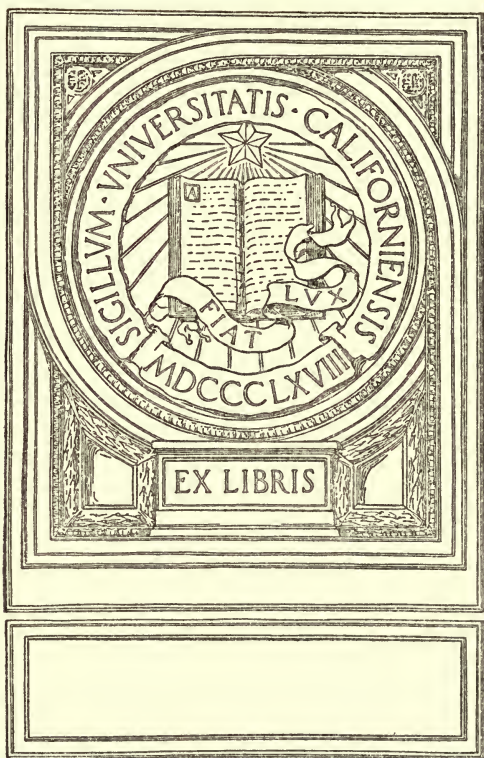


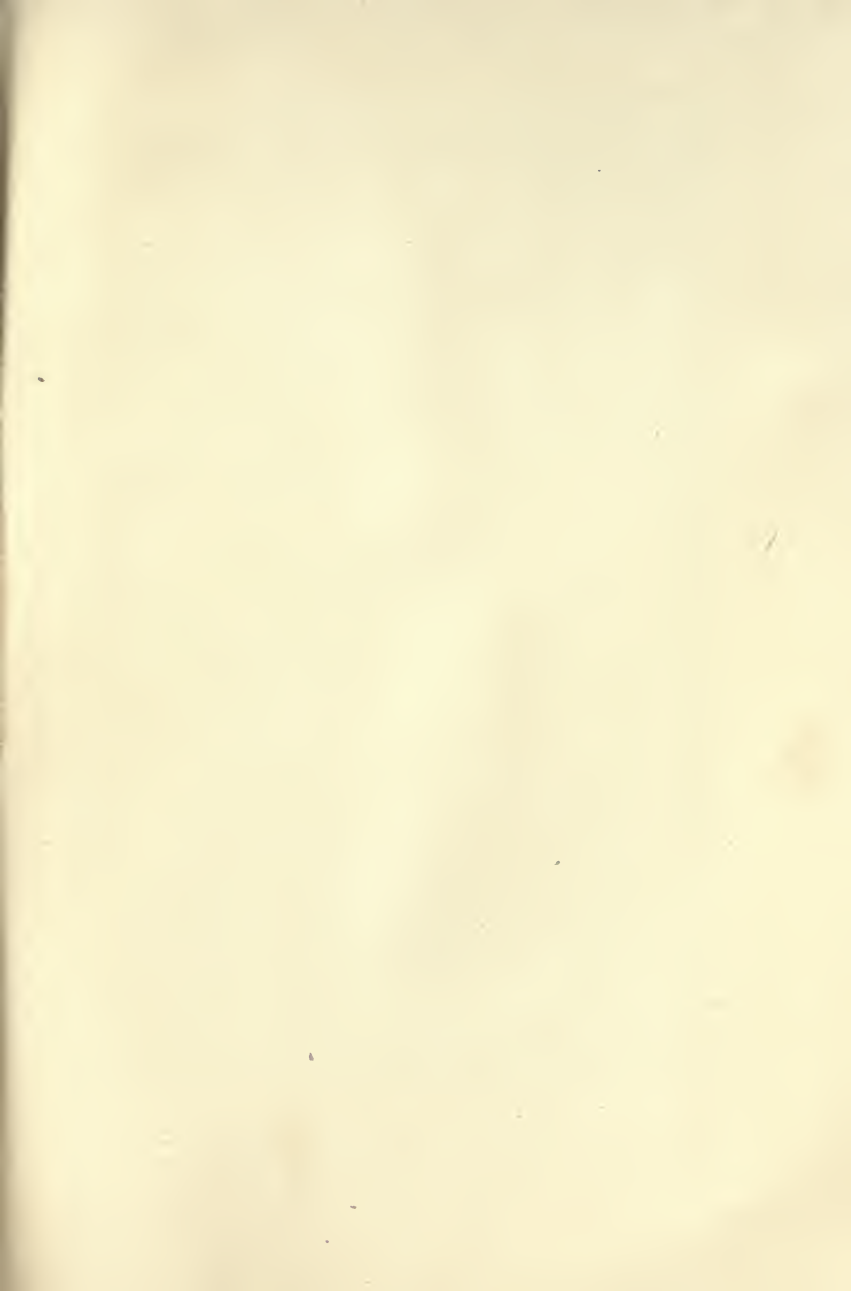


THE MARRYERS

• IRVING •
BACHELLER



T. G. Thompson





[See page 216]

Richard met us at the dock, and the young people fell into each other's arms.

THE MARRYERS

A HISTORY
GATHERED FROM A BRIEF OF
THE HONORABLE SOCRATES POTTER

BY
IRVING BACHELLER

ILLUSTRATED

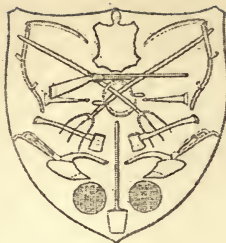


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America vs. Sundry Feudal Tendencies

OFFICE OF
SOCRATES POTTER
POINTVIEW
CONN.

To the Honorable Judges of Decency
and Good Behavior the World Over:

My friend, the novelist, has prevailed upon me to write this brief in behalf of my country and against certain feudal tendencies therein. I have tried to tell the truth, but with that moderation which becomes a lawyer of my age and experience. It is bad manners to give a guest more wine than he can carry or more truth than he can believe. In these pages there is enough wine, I hope, for the necessary illusion, and enough truth, I know, for the satisfaction of my conscience. I hasten to add that there is not enough of wine or truth to stagger those who are not accustomed to the use of either. I warned the novelist that nothing could be more unfortunate for me than that I should betray a talent for fiction. He assures me that my reputation is not in danger.

Socrates Potter

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CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	IN WHICH MR. POTTER PRESENTS THE SINGULAR DILEMMA OF WHITFIELD NORRIS, MULTI- MILLIONAIRE	I
II.	MY INTERVIEW WITH THE PIRATE	21
III.	IN WHICH A MAN IS SEEN HOLDING DOWN THE BUSHEL THAT HIDES HIS LIGHT	30
IV.	A RATHER SWIFT ADVENTURE WITH THE PIRATE	43
V.	IN WHICH WE HAVE AN AMUSING VOYAGE .	52
VI.	WE ARRIVE IN THE LAND OF LOVE AND SONG	65
VII.	IN WHICH I TEACH THE DIFFICULT ART OF BEING AN AMERICAN IN ITALY	80
VIII.	I AGREE TO FIGHT A DUEL AND NAME A WEAPON WITH WHICH EUROPEAN GENTLE- MEN ARE UNFAMILIAR	102
IX.	A MODERN AMERICAN MARRYER ENTERS THE SCENE	112
X.	A DAY OF ADVENTURES WITH TUSCAN ARTISTS AND OTHERS	127
XI.	IN WHICH WE GET INTO THE FLASH AND GLITTER OF HIGH LIFE	140

CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
XII. IN WHICH NORRIS TAKES HIS LIGHT FROM UNDER THE BUSHEL	158
XIII. IN WHICH I FIGHT A DUEL WITH ONE OF THE OLDEST WEAPONS IN THE WORLD . . .	170
XIV. MISS GWENDOLYN DEFINES HER POSITION .	182
XV. SOMETHING HAPPENS TO THE MAN MUGGS .	192

THE MARRYERS

I

IN WHICH MR. POTTER PRESENTS THE SINGULAR
DILEMMA OF WHITFIELD NORRIS,
MULTIMILLIONAIRE

I HAVE just returned from Italy—the land of love and song. To any who may be looking forward to a career in love or song I recommend Italy. Its art, scenery, and wine have been a great help to the song business, while its pictures, statues, and soft air are well calculated to keep the sexes from drifting apart and becoming hopelessly estranged. The sexes will have their differences, of course, as they are having them in England. I sometimes fear that they may decide to have noth-

THE MARRYERS

ing more to do with each other, in which case Italy, with its alert and well-trained corps of love-makers, might save the situation.

Since Ovid and Horace, times have changed in the old peninsula. Love has ceased to be an art and has become an industry to which the male members of the titolati are assiduously devoted. With hereditary talent for the business, they have made it pay. The coy processes in the immortal tale of Masuccio of Salerno are no longer fashionable. The Juliets have descended from the balcony; the Romeos climb the trellis no more. All that machinery is now too antiquated and unbusinesslike. The Juliets are mostly English and American girls who have come down the line from Saint Moritz. The Romeos are still Italians, but the bobsled, the toboggan, and the tango dance have supplanted the balcony and the trellis as being swifter, less wordy, and more direct.

There are other forms of love which thrive in Italy—the noblest which the human breast may know—the love of art, for instance, and the love of America. I came back with a

THE MARRYERS

deeper affection for Uncle Sam than I ever had before.

But this is only the cold vestibule—the “piazz” of my story. Come in, dear reader. There’s a cheerful blaze and a comfortable chair in the chimney-corner. Make yourself at home, and now my story’s begun exactly where I began to live in it—inside the big country house of a client of mine, an hour’s ride from New York. His name wasn’t Whitfield Norris, and so we will call him that. His age was about fifty-five, his name well known. If ever a man was born for friendship he was the man—a kindly but strong face, genial blue eyes, and the love of good fellowship. But he had few friends and no intimates beyond his family circle. True, he had a gruff voice and a broken nose, and was not much of a talker. Of Norris, the financier, many knew more or less; of Norris, the man, he and his family seemed to enjoy a monopoly of information. It was not quite a monopoly, however, as I discovered when I began to observe the deep undercurrents of his life. Right away he asked me to look at them.

THE MARRYERS

Norris had written that he wished to consult me, and was forbidden by his doctor to go far from his country house, where he was trying to rest. Years before he had put a detail of business in my hands, and I had had some luck with it.

His glowing wife and daughter met me at the railroad-station with a glowing footman and a great, glowing limousine. The wife was a restored masterpiece of the time of Andrew Johnson—by which I mean that she was a very handsome woman, whose age varied from thirty to fifty-five, according to the day and the condition of your eyesight. She trained more or less in fashionable society, and even coughed with an English accent. The daughter was a lovely blonde, blue-eyed girl of twenty. She was tall and substantial—built for all weather and especially well-roofed—a real human being, with sense enough to laugh at my jokes and other serious details in her environment.

We arrived at the big, plain, comfortable house just in time for luncheon. Norris met me at the door. He looked pale and care-

THE MARRYERS

worn, but greeted me playfully, and I remarked that he seemed to be feeling his oats.

"Feeling my oats! Well, I should say so," he answered. "No man's oats ever filled him with deeper feeling."

Like so many American business men, his brain had all feet in the trough, so to speak, and was getting more than its share of blood, while the other vital organs in his system were probably only half fed.

At the table I met Richard Forbes, a handsome, husky young man who seemed to take a special interest in Miss Gwendolyn, the daughter. There were also the aged mother of Norris, two maiden cousins of his—jolly women between forty-five and fifty years of age—a college president, and Mrs. Mushtop, a proud and talkative lady who explained to me that she was one of the Mushtops of Maryland. Of course you have met those interesting people. Ever since 1627 the Mushtops have been coming over from England with the first Lord Baltimore, and now they are quite numerous. While we ate, Norris said little,

THE MARRYERS

but seemed to enjoy the jests and stories better than the food.

He had a great liking for good tobacco, and after luncheon showed me the room where he kept his cigars. There were thousands of them made from the best crops of Cuba, in sizes to suit the taste.

"Here are some from the crop of '93," he said, as he opened a box. "I have green cigars, if you prefer them, but I never smoke a cigar unless it crackles."

I took a crackler, and with its delicious aroma under my nose we went for a walk in the villa gardens. Some one had released a dozen Airedales, of whom my host was extremely fond, and they followed at his heels. I walked with the maiden cousins, one of whom said of Norris: "We're very fond of him. Often we sing, 'What a friend we have in Whitfield!' and it amuses him very much."

And it suggested to me that they had good reason to sing it.

Norris was extremely fond of beautiful things, and his knowledge of both art and flowers was unusual. He showed us the con-

THE MARRYERS

servatories and his art-gallery filled with masterpieces, but very calmly and with no flourish.

"I've only a few landscapes here," he said, "things that do not seem to quarrel with the hills and valleys."

"Or the hay and whiskers and the restful spirit beneath them," I suggested.

I knew that he had bought in every market of the world, and had given some of his best treasures to sundry museums of art in America, but they were always credited to "a friend," and never to Whitfield Norris.

On our return to the house he asked me to ride with him, and we got into the big car and went out for a leisurely trip on the country roads. The farmer-folk in field and dooryard waved their hands and stirred their whiskers as we passed.

"They're all my friends," he said.

"Tenants and vassals!" I remarked.

"You see, I've helped some of them in a small way, but always impersonally," he answered, as if he had not heard me. "I have sought to avoid drawing their attention to me in any way whatever."

THE MARRYERS

We drew up at a little house on a lonely road to ask our way. An Irish woman came to the car door as we stopped, and said:

"God bless ye, sor! It does me eyes good to look an' see ye better—thanks to the good God! I haven't forgot yer kindness."

"But I have," said Norris.

The woman was on her mental knees before him as she stood looking into his face. No doubt he had lifted her mortgage or favored her in some like manner. Her greeting seemed to please him, and he gave her a kindly word, and told his driver to go on.

We passed the Mary Perkins's school and the Mary Perkins's hospital, both named for his wife. I had heard much of these model charities, but not from him. So many rich men talk of their good deeds, like the lecturer in a side-show, but he held his peace. Everywhere I could not help seeing that he was regarded as a kind of savior, and he seemed to regret it. Was he a great actor or—?

"It's a pity that I cannot enjoy my life like other men," he interrupted, as this thought came to me. "None of my neighbors are

THE MARRYERS

quite themselves when they talk to me; they think I must be praised and flattered. They don't talk to me in a reliable fashion, as you do. You have noticed that even my own family is given to songs of praise in my presence."

"Norris, I'm sorry for you," I said. "They say that you inherited a fair amount of poverty — honest, hard - earned poverty. Why didn't you take care of it? Why did you get reckless and squander it in commercial dissipation? You should have kept enough to give your daughter a proper start in life. I have taken care of mine."

"It began in the thoughtless imprudence of youth," he went on, playfully. "I used to think that money was an asset."

"And you have discovered that money is only a jackasset."

"That it is, in fact, a liability, and that every man you meet is dunning you for a part of it."

"Including the lawyers you meet," I said.

"Oh, they're the worst of all!" he laughed. "As distributors of the world's poverty they are unrivaled."

THE MARRYERS

He smiled and shook his head with a look of amusement and injury as he went on.

"Almost every one who comes near me has a hatchet if not an ax to grind. I am sick of being a little tin god. I seem to be standing in a high place where I can see all the selfishness of the world about me. No, it hasn't made me a cynic. I have some sympathy for the most transparent of them; but generally I am rather gruff and ill-natured; often I lose my temper. I have had enough of praise and flattery to understand how weary of it the Almighty must be. He must see how cheap it is, and if He has humor, as of course He has, having given so much of it to His children, how He must laugh at some of the gross adulation that is offered Him! But let us get to business.

"I invited you here to engage your services in a most important matter; it's so important that for many years I have given it my own attention. But my health is failing, and I must get rid of this problem, which is, in a way, like the riddle of the Sphinx. Some other fellow must tackle it, and I've chosen you for the

THE MARRYERS

job. Mr. Potter, you are to be, if you will, my trustiest friend as well as my attorney. For many years I have been the victim of blackmailers, and have paid them a lot of money."

"Poverty is a good thing, but not if it's achieved through the aid of a blackmailer," I remarked. "Try some other scheme."

"But you must know the facts," he went on. "At twenty-one I went into business with my father out in Illinois. He got into financial difficulties and committed a crime—forged a man's name to a note, intending to pay it when it came due. Suddenly, in a panic, he went on the rocks, and all his plans failed. He was up against it, as we say. There were many extenuating circumstances—a generous man, an extravagant family, of which I had been the most extravagant member; a mind that lost its balance under a great strain. He had risked all on a throw of the dice and lost. I'll never forget the hour in which he confessed the truth to me. It's hard for a father to put on the crown of shame in the presence of a child who honors him. There's no pang

THE MARRYERS

in this world like that. He had braced himself for the trial, and what a trial it must have been! I have suffered some since that day; but all of it put together is nothing compared to that hour of his. In ten minutes I saw him wither into old age as he burned in the fire of his own hell. When he was done with his story I saw that he was virtually dead, although he could still breathe and see and speak and walk. As I listened a sense of personal responsibility and of great calmness and strength came on me.

“I took my father’s arm and went home with him and begged him not to worry. Then forthwith I went to police headquarters and took the crime on myself. My father went to paradise the next day, and I to prison. I was young and could stand it. They gave me a light sentence, on account of my age—only two years, reduced to a year and a half for good behavior. My Lord! It has been hard to tell you this. I’ve never told any one but you; not even my own mother knows the truth, and I wouldn’t have her know it for all the world. I cleared out and went to work in

THE MARRYERS

California, in the mines. Suffered poverty and hardship; won success by and by; prospered, and slowly my little hell cooled down. But no man can escape from his past. By and by it overtakes him, and in time it caught me. A record is a record, and you can't wipe it out even with righteous living. It may be forgiven—yes, but there it is and there it will remain.

"I didn't marry, as you may know, until I was thirty-four. My wife was the daughter of a small merchant in an Oregon village. I had been married about a year when the first pirate fired across my bows—a man who had worked beside me at Joliet. I found him in my office one morning. He didn't know how much money I had, and struck me gently, softly, for a thousand dollars. It was to be a loan. I gave him the money; I had to. Why? Well, you see, my wife didn't know that I was an ex-convict, and I couldn't bear to have her know of it. I did not fear her so much as her friends, some of whom were jealous of our success. Why hadn't I told her before my marriage? you are thinking. Well,

THE MARRYERS

partly because I honored my father and my mother, and partly because I had no sense of guilt in me. Secretly I was rather proud of the thing I had done. If I had been really guilty of a crime I should have had to tell her; but, you see, my heart was clean—just as clean as she thought it. I hadn't fooled her about that. There had been nothing coming to *me*. Oh yes, I know that I ought to have told her. I'm only giving you the arguments with which I convinced myself—with which even now I try to convince myself—that it wasn't necessary. Anyhow, when I married it never entered my head that there could be a human being so low that he would try to fan back to life the dying embers of my trouble and use it for a source of profit. It never occurred to me that any man would come along and say: 'Here, give me money or I'll make it burn ye.'

"I foolishly thought that my sacrifice was my own property, and was beginning to forget it. Well, first to last, this man got forty thousand dollars out of me. He was dying of consumption when he made his last call,

THE MARRYERS

having spent the money in fast living. He wanted five thousand dollars, and promised never to ask me for another cent. He kept his word, and died within three months, but not until he had sold his pull to another scoundrel. The new pirate was an advertising agent of the Far West. He came to me with the whole story in manuscript, ready to print. He said that he had bought it from two men who had brought the manuscript to his office, and had paid five thousand dollars for it. He was such a nice man!—willing to sell at cost and a small allowance for time expended. I gave him all he asked, and since then I have been buying that story every six months or so. When anything happens, like the coming out of my daughter, this sleek-looking, plausible pirate shows up again, and, you see, I can't kick him out of my presence, as I should like to do. He always tells me that the mysterious two are demanding more money, so, like a bull with a ring in his nose, I have been pulled about for years by this little knave of a man. I couldn't help it. Now my nerves cannot endure any more of this kind of thing. My doctor tells

THE MARRYERS

me that I must be free from all worry; I propose to turn it over to you."

"Then I shall wipe him off the slate," I said.

"They'll publish the facts."

"Poor man!" I exclaimed. "You've got one big asset, and you're afraid to claim it. Nothing that you have ever done compares with that term in prison. Your charities have been large, but, after all, their value is doubtful except to you. The old law of evolution isn't greatly in need of your money. But when you went to prison you really did something, old man. The light of a deed like that shines around the world. Let it shine—if it must. Don't hide it under a bushel."

"But not for all I am worth would I have my father's name dishonored, with my mother still alive," he declared. "Now, as to myself, I am not so much worried. I could bear some disgrace, for it wouldn't alter the facts. I should keep my self-respect, anyhow. But when I think of my wife and children I admit that I am a coward. They're pretty proud, as you know, and the worst of it is they are proud of me. Their pride is my best asset."

THE MARRYERS

I couldn't bear to see it broken down. No, what I want is to have you manage this blackmail fund and keep all comers contented. What money you need for that purpose will be supplied to you."

"In my opinion you're unjust to the ladies of your home," I remarked.

"How?"

"You should treat them like human beings and not like angels," I said. "It's their right to share your troubles. They'd be all the better for it."

"Please do as I say," he answered. "You must remember that they're all I've got."

"Cheer up! I'll do my best," was my assurance. "But I shall ask you to let me manage the matter in my own way and with no interference."

"I commit my happiness to your keeping," he answered.

"I wonder that you have got off so cheaply," I said. "I should think there might have been a dozen pirates in the chase instead of two."

"Circumstances have favored me," he explained. "I spent my youth in Germany, where I was educated. I had been in America

THE MARRYERS

only six months when my father failed. In those days I was known as Jackson W. Norris. In California I got into a row and had my nose broken. I was a good-looking man before that. Then, you see, it has been a rule of my life to keep my face from being photographed. Of course, the papers have had snap-shots of me; but no one who knew me as a boy would recognize this bent nose and wrinkled face of mine. I have discouraged all manner of publicity relating to me and kept my history under cover as a thing that concerned no one but myself."

I had requested that our ride should end at the railroad-station, and we arrived there in good time for my train.

"I will ask Wilton, my pirate friend, to call on you," he said.

"Let him call Friday at twelve with a note from you," I requested.

Gwendolyn Norris and Richard Forbes were waiting at the station, the latter being on his way to town.

"Going back? You ought to know better," I said.

THE MARRYERS

"So I do, but business is business," he answered.

"And there's no better business for any one than playing with a fair maid."

"He knows that there's a tennis match this afternoon and a dance this evening, and he leaves me," the girl complained.

"I shall have to take a week off and come up here and convince you that no man is fonder of fun and a fair maid," said Forbes.

"I could do it in ten minutes," I declared.

"But you have had practice and experience," said Forbes.

"And you are more supple," was my answer.

"I should hope so," the girl laughed. "If all men were like Mr. Potter the world would be full of old maids. It took him thirty years to make up his mind to get married."

"No, it took *her* that long—not me," I answered, and the arrival of the train saved me from further humiliation.

On the way to town I got acquainted with young Forbes, and liked him. He was a big, broad-shouldered athlete, two years out of col-

THE MARRYERS

lege. The glow of health and good nature was in his face. His blue eyes twinkled merrily as we sparred for points. He had a full line of convictions, but he didn't pretend to have gathered all the fruit on the tree of knowledge. He was the typical best product of the modern wholesale man factory—strong, modest, self-restrained, well educated, and thinking largely in terms of profit and loss. That is to say, he was sawed and planed and matched and seasoned like ten thousand other young men of his age. His great need had been poverty and struggle and individual experience. If he had had to climb and reach and fall and get up and climb again to secure the persimmon which was now in his hands, he would have had the persimmon and a very rare thing besides, and it's the rare thing that counts. But here I am finding fault with a thoroughly good fellow. It's only to clear his background for the reader, to whose good graces I heartily recommend the young man. His father had left him well off, but he had gone to work on a great business plan, and with rare talent for his task, as it seemed to me.

II

MY INTERVIEW WITH THE PIRATE

IT had been a misty morning, with slush in the streets. For hours the great fog-siren had been bellowing to the ships on the sound and breaking into every conversation. "Go slow and keep away!" it screeched, in a kind of mechanical hysterics.

I was sitting at my desk when Norris's pirate came in. I didn't like the look of him, for I saw at once that he was hard wood, and that he wouldn't whittle. He was a sleek, handsome, well-dressed man of middle age, with gray eyes, iron-gray hair and mustache, the latter close-cropped. Here, then, was Wilton—a man of catlike neatness from top to toe. He stepped softly like a cat. Then he began smoothing his fur—neatly folded his coat and carefully laid it over the back of a chair; blew a speck of dust from his hat, and

THE MARRYERS

tenderly flicked its brim with his handkerchief and placed it with gentle precision on the top of the coat. It's curious how the habit of taking care gets into the character of a gentleman thief. He almost purred when he said "Good morning." Then he seemed to smell the dog, and stopped and took in his surroundings. His hands were small and bony; he felt his necktie, adjusted his cuffs with an outward thrust of both arms, and sat down. Without a word more he handed me the note from Norris, and I read it.

"Yes," I said; "Mr. Norris has given me a brief history of your affectionate regard for him."

He tried to take my measure with a keen glance. I looked serious, and he took me seriously.

"You see," he began, in a low voice, "for years I have been trying to protect him from unscrupulous men."

He gently touched the end of one forefinger with the point of the other as he spoke. His words were neatly said, and were like his clothing, neatly pressed and dusted, and calculated to present a respectable appearance.

THE MARRYERS

"Tell me all about it," I said. "Norris didn't go into details."

"Understand," he went on, gently moving his head as if to shake it down in his linen a little more comfortably, "I have never made a cent out of this. I have only kept enough to cover my expenses."

It was the old story long familiar to me. The gentleman knave generally operates on a high moral plane. Sometimes he can even fool himself about it. He had climbed on a saint's pedestal and was looking down on me. It shows the respect they all have for honor.

"There are two men besides myself who know the facts, and I have succeeded so far in keeping them quiet," he added.

"I don't know you, but you won't be offended if I assume that you're a man of honor," I said.

In the half-moment of silence that followed the old fog-siren screeched a warning.

There was a quick, nervous movement of the visitor's body that brought his head a little nearer to me. The fur had begun to rise on the cat's back.

THE MARRYERS

"There's nothing to prevent it," said he, with a look of surprise.

"Save a possible element of professional pride," was my answer.

"That vanishes in the presence of a lawyer," said he.

It was a kind of swift and surprising cuff with the paw, after which I knew him better.

"But we're licensed, you know, and now, your reputation being established, I suggest that you are in honor bound to let us know the names of those men."

"Excuse me! I'm above that kind of thing—way above it," said he, with a smile of regret for my ignorance.

"Perhaps you wouldn't be above explaining."

"Not at all. If I told you that, I would be as bad as they are. Why, sir, I would be the yellowest yellow dog in the country."

"Frankness is not apt to have an effect so serious," I said.

Again the points of his forefingers came together as he gently answered:

"You see, the first demand they made of

THE MARRYERS

me, after putting the story in my hands, was that I should never give out their names. I had to promise that."

"Oh, I see. They've elected you to the office of Guardian Angel and Secretary of the Treasury. How did it happen?"

The query didn't annoy him. He was getting used to my sallies, and went on:

"It was easy and natural as drawing your breath. Those men knew that I had met Mr. Norris—that I was a man of his class, and could talk to him on even terms. They had got the story from a man now dead—paid him five hundred dollars for it. They wanted my help to make a profit, see? I had met Mr. Norris and liked him. He is one of Nature's noblemen. So I played a friendly part in the matter, and bought the story and turned it over to Mr. Norris for what it cost me, and he gave me two hundred dollars for my time. Unfortunately, they have turned out to be rascals, and we have had to keep them in spending money, and prosperity has made them extravagant. The whole thing has become a nuisance to me, and I wish I was out of it."

THE MARRYERS

"What do they want now?" I asked.

"Ten thousand dollars."

That was all he said—just those three well-filled words—with a sad but firm look in his face and a neat little gesture of both hands.

"When do they want it?"

"To-day; they're getting impatient."

"Suppose you tell them that they'll have to practise economy for a week or so at least. I don't know but we shall decide to let them go ahead and do their worst. It isn't going to hurt Norris. He's been foolish about it; I'm trying to stiffen his backbone."

Wilton rose with a look of impatience in his face that betrayed him.

"Very well; but *I* shall not be responsible for the consequences."

The cat had hissed for the first time, but he quickly recovered himself; the tender look returned to his eyes.

"I think you're foolish," he began again, while his right forefinger caressed the point of his left. "These men are not going to last long. One of them has had delirium tremens twice, and the other is in the hospital with

THE MARRYERS

Bright's disease. They're both of them broke, and you know as well as I that they could get this money in an hour from some newspaper. It's almost dead sure that both of these men will be out of the way in a year or so. Norris wants to be protected, and it's up to you and me to do it."

"Personally I do not see the object," I insisted. "Protecting him from one assault only exposes him to another."

"You see, the daughter isn't married yet, and we'd better protect the name until *she's* out of the way, anyhow. That girl can go to Europe and take her pick. She's good enough for any title. But if this came out it would hurt her chances."

"Mr. Wilton, I congratulate you," was my remark.

"I thought you would see the point," he answered, with a smile.

"I am thinking not of the point, but of your philanthropy. It is beautiful. Do you sleep well nights?"

"Very," he answered, with a quick glance into my eyes.

THE MARRYERS

"I should think that the troubles of the world would keep you awake."

His face flushed a little, and then he smiled.

"You lawyers have no suspicion of the amount of goodness there is in the world—you're always looking for rascals," he said.

"But we have wandered. Let us take the nearest road to Rome. You say they must have money to-day."

"Before three o'clock."

"We'll give them ten thousand dollars—not a cent more. You must tell them to use it gently, for it's the last they'll get from us. To whom shall I draw the check?"

"To me—Lysander Wilton," he answered, with a look of relief.

I gave him the check. He put on his coat and began to purr again; he was glad to know me, and rightly thought that he could turn some business my way.

As he left my office I went to one of the front windows and took out my handkerchief. The fog-whistle blew a blast that swept sea and land with its echoes. In a moment I saw a certain clever, keen-eyed man who was

THE MARRYERS

studying current history under the direction of Prof. William J. Burns come out of a door opposite and walk at a leisurely pace down the main street of Pointview toward the station. He was now taking the first steps in a systematic effort to see what was in and behind the man Wilton.

III

IN WHICH A MAN IS SEEN HOLDING DOWN THE BUSHEL THAT HIDES HIS LIGHT

THE first thing I desired was the history of Wilton. He knew more about us than we knew about him, and that didn't seem to be fair or even necessary. In fact, I felt sure that his little world would yield valuable knowledge if properly explored. I knew that there were lions and tigers in it.

I learned that Wilton had proceeded forthwith to a certain apartment house on the upper west side of New York, in which he remained until dinner-time, when he came out with a well-dressed woman and drove in a cab to Martin's. The two spent a careless night, which ended at four A. M. in a gambling-house, where Wilton had lost nine hundred dollars. Next day, about noon, his well-dressed woman friend came out of the house and was trailed

THE MARRYERS

to a bank, where she cashed a check for five hundred dollars. We learned there that this woman was an actress and that her balance was about eighty-five hundred dollars.

Three months passed, and I got no further news of the man, save that he had gone to Chicago and that our trailers had gone with him.

"Our Western office now has the matter in hand," so the agency wrote me. "They are doing their work with extreme care. Fresh men took up the trail every day, until one of our ablest became a trusted confidant of Wilton."

The whole matter rested in the files of my office, and I had not thought of it until one day Norris sent for me and, on my arrival at his house, showed me a telegram. It was from the President of the United States, whose career he had assisted in one way and another. It offered him the post of Minister to a European court. The place was one of the great prizes.

"Of course you will accept it?" I said.

"I should like to," he answered, "but isn't

THE MARRYERS

it curious that fame is one of the things which fate denies me. I wouldn't dare take it."

I understood him and said nothing.

"You see, I cannot be a big man. I must keep myself as *little* as possible."

"The joys of littleness are very great, as the mouse remarked at the battle of Gettysburg; but they are not for you," I said. "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

"He that humbleth himself shall avoid trouble—that's the way it hits me," he said. "I could have been Secretary of the Treasury a few years back if I had dared. I must let everything alone which is likely to stir up my history. Suppose the President should suddenly discover that he had an ex-convict in his Cabinet? Do you think he could stand that, great as he is? He would rightly say that I had tricked and deceived and disgraced him. What would the newspapers say, and what would people think of me? Potter, I've made a study of this thing we call civilization. It's a big thing—I do not underestimate it—but it isn't big enough to forgive a man who has served his term."

THE MARRYERS

"Yes, I know; some of us are always looking for a thief inside the honest man," was my answer. "We ought to be looking for the honest man inside the thief, as Chesterton puts it."

"That's a good idea!" he exclaimed. "Find me one. I'd like to use him to teach this world a lesson. I'd pay you a handsome salary as Diogenes. If you succeed once I'll astonish you with generosity."

"I should like to help you to get rid of some of this money of yours," I said.

"You can begin this morning," he went on. "I'm going to give you some notes for a new will. Suppose you sit down at the table there."

I spent the rest of that day taking notes, and was astonished at the amount of his property and the breadth of his spirit. He had got his start in the mining business, and with surprising insight had invested his earnings in real estate, oil-lands, railroad stocks, and steel-mills.

"I have always believed in America, and America has made me rich," he said to me.

THE MARRYERS

“Before the Spanish War and in every panic, when no man seemed to want her securities, I have bought them freely, and I own them to-day. With our growing trade and fruitful lands I wonder that all thinking men did not share my confidence. If America had gone to smash I should have gone with her. I shall stick to the old ship.”

One paragraph of the will has begun to make history. It has appeared in the newspapers, but no account of my friend should omit it, and therefore I present its wording here:

“There are many points of greatness in the Christian faith, but the greatest of all is charity. I conceive that the best argument for the heathen is that of wheat and corn. I therefore direct that the sum of five million dollars be set aside and invested by the trustees of this will and that its proceeds be applied to the relief of the distressing poverty of unconverted peoples, wherever they may be, in the discretion of said trustees; and when said relief is applied it shall be done as the act of ‘A Christian friend in America.’ It is my wish that wherever practicable in the judgment

THE MARRYERS

of said trustees this relief shall be applied through the establishment of industries in which the needy shall be employed at fair wages."

I had finished my notes for the will, and my friend and I were sitting comfortably by the open fire, when his wife entered the room and sat down with us.

"Have you told Mr. Potter about the bank offer?" she inquired of her husband.

"No, my dear," he answered.

"May I tell him?"

"Certainly."

"Mr. Potter, the presidency of a great bank has been offered to my husband, and I think that he ought to take it."

"Oh, I have work enough here at home—all I can do," he said.

"But you will not have much to do there—only a little consulting once a week or so, and they say that you can talk to them here if you wish."

"It's too much responsibility," he answered.

"But it's so respectable," she urged. "My heart is set on it. They tell me that, next to

THE MARRYERS

Mr. Morgan, you would be the greatest power in American finance. We should all be so proud of you."

"I couldn't wish you to be any more proud of me," he answered, tenderly.

"But, naturally, we want you to be as great as you can, Whitfield," she went on. "This would mean so much to me and to Gwendolyn."

He rose wearily, with a glance into my eyes which I perfectly understood, and went to his wife and kissed her and said:

"My dear, I am sure that Mr. Potter will agree with me."

"Unreservedly," was my answer.

I knew then that this ambitious woman was as ignorant as the cattle in their farmyard of the greater honors which he had declined.

She rose and left the room with a look of disappointment. How far the urgency of his wife and other misguided friends may have gone I know not, but I have reason to believe that it put him to his wit's ends.

I am sure that it was the most singular

THE MARRYERS

situation in which a lawyer was ever consulted. My client's high character had commanded the love and confidence of all who knew him well, and this love and confidence were pushing him into danger. His own character was the wood of the cross on which he was being crucified.

That week I appeared for Norris in a case of some importance in New York. One day in court a letter was put in my hands from the editor of a great newspaper. It requested that I should call upon him that day or appoint an hour when he could see me at my hotel. I went to his office.

"Is it true that Norris is to be our new minister to—?" he asked.

"It is not true," I said.

"Is it true that he served a term in an Illinois prison?"

"Why do you ask?"

"For the reason that a story to that effect is now in this office."

It was a critical moment, and I did not know how to behave myself.

"I mean that a man has submitted the story—he wishes to sell it," he added.

THE MARRYERS

"Forgive me if I speak a piece to you," I said. "It will be short and to the point."

As nearly as I could remember them I repeated the noble lines of Whitman:

"And still goes one, saying,
'What will ye give me and I will deliver this man unto
you?'
And they make the covenant and pay the pieces of silver,
The old, old fee . . . paid for the Son of Mary.

"If there's any descendant of Judas Iscariot on this paper I shall see to it that his name and relationship are made known," I added.

"We have not bought the article, and it is not likely that we shall," said he. "If you wish to answer my question I shall make no use of your words."

There are times when one has to act and act promptly on his own judgment, and when the fate of a friend is in the balance it is a hard thing to do. So I quickly chose my landing and jumped.

"I have only this to say," I answered. "Mr. Norris served a term in prison when he was a boy, but the facts are of such a nature

THE MARRYERS

that it wouldn't be safe for you to publish any part of them."

I saw a query in his eye as he looked at me, and I went on:

"They are loaded—that's the reason—loaded to the muzzle, and they'd come pretty near blowing up your establishment. You know my reputation possibly."

"Oh, very well."

"Then you know that I am not in the habit of going off at half-cock. I tell you the facts would put you squarely on the Judas roll, and it isn't a popular part to play. Briefly, the facts are: Norris suffered for a friend, and that puts him on a plane so high that it isn't safe to touch him."

"On your word, Mr. Potter, I will do what I can to kill the story—now and hereafter," said he. "The young man who wrote it is a decent fellow and will soon be in my employ. But of course Norris will decline to be put in high places."

Even this enlightened editor saw that a man who had suffered prison blight was a kind of frost-bitten plum. I left him with a

THE MARRYERS

feeling of discouragement in the world and its progress.

Before a week had passed I was summoned to the home of Norris and found him ill in bed. He was in the midst of a nervous breakdown which had seemed to begin with a critical attack of indigestion. It wearied him even to sign and execute his will, and I saw him for only a few minutes, and not again for months.

He improved rapidly, and one day Gwendolyn Norris called at my office.

The family were sailing for Hamburg within a week to spend the rest of the winter at Carlsbad and Saint Moritz. She said:

"Father wishes me to begin my business career, and so I've been looking after the details, and you must tell me if there's anything that I have forgotten."

I went over all the arrangements regarding cats and dogs and horses and tickets and hotel accommodations, and then asked, playfully:

"What provision have you made for the young men you are leaving?"

"There's only one," said she, with laughing

THE MARRYERS

eyes, "and he can take care of himself. He doesn't seem to need any of my help. But he's fine. I recommend him to you as a friend."

"Yes, I understand. You want me to get his confidence and see that he goes to bed early and doesn't forget his friends."

She blushed and laughed, and added:

"Or get into bad company!"

"You're a regular ward politician!" I said. "Don't worry. I'll keep my eye on him."

"You don't even know his name," she declared.

"Don't I? The name Richard is written all over your face."

"How uncanny!" she exclaimed. "I'm going to leave you." Then she added, with a playful look in her eyes, "You know it's a dangerous place for American girls who—who are unattached."

"We don't want to frighten him."

"It wouldn't be possible—he's awfully brave," said she, with a merry laugh as she left me.

That was the last I saw of them before they sailed.

THE MARRYERS

My friend had taken his doctor with him, and soon the latter wrote me from the mountain resort that Norris had improved, but that I must not appeal to him in any matter of business. All excitement would be bad for him, and if it came suddenly might lead to fatal results.

IV

A RATHER SWIFT ADVENTURE WITH THE PIRATE

MIDWINTER had arrived when the checked current of our little history became active again. My wife had thought that our life in Pointview was a trifle sluggish, and we had been in town for two weeks. I had recommended the Waldorf-Castoria as being good for sluggish livers, but Betsey preferred the Manhattan. We were there when this telegram reached me from Chicago.

W. left for N. Y. this morning, broke. He will call on you. Important news by mail.

I expected to have some fun with him, and did.

The same mail brought the "important news" and a note from Wilton, which said:

I must see you within twenty-four hours. The need is pressing. Please wire appointment.

THE MARRYERS

Many salient points in the career of Wilton lay before me. It's singular how much it may cost to learn the history of one little man. For half the sum that I was to pay for Wilton's record a commonplace intellect should have been able to acquire every important fact in the history of the world. Wilton, whose real name was Muggs, was wanted in Mexico for grand larceny, and very grand larceny at that, for he had absconded twelve years before with twenty thousand dollars belonging to the business in which he had been engaged. They had got their clue from a letter which he had carelessly left in his coat-pocket when he entered a Turkish bath, but of that part of the matter I need say no more. It was quite likely that he was wanted in other places, but this was want enough for my purpose.

It was Saturday, and Betsey had gone to Pointview; I was to follow her that evening for the week-end. No fog that day. The sun was shining in clear air.

When Wilton came my program had been arranged. It began as soon as he entered my room. The cat was purring when suddenly

THE MARRYERS

the dog jumped at her. It was the dog in my voice as I said:

“Good morning, you busted philanthropist! Why didn’t you tell me at once that your name was Muggs. You might have saved me the expense of employing a dozen detectives to learn what you could have told me in five minutes. As a saint you’re a failure. Why didn’t you tell me that they wanted you down in Mexico?”

The cat was gone—jumped out of the open window, perhaps. I never saw her again. Muggs stood unmasked before me. He was a man now. His face changed color. His right hand went up to his brow, and then, as if wondering what it was there for, began deftly smoothing his hair, while his lower lip came up to the tips of his cropped mustache. His eyelids quivered slightly. The fingers in that telltale hand began to tremble like a flag of distress.

In a second, before he had time to recover, I swung again, and very vigorously.

“If you’re going to save yourself you haven’t a minute to lose. The detectives want that

THE MARRYERS

reward, and they're after you. They telephoned me not ten minutes ago. I'll do what I can for you, but I make one condition."

"Excuse me," he said, as he pulled himself together. "I didn't know that you had such a taste for history."

"I love to study the history of philanthropists," I said. "Yours thrilled me. I couldn't stop till I got to this minute. You're just beginning a new chapter, and I want you to give it a heading right now. Shall it be 'Prison Life' or 'In the Way of Reform'?"

Again the man spoke.

"As God's my witness, I want to live honest," said he.

"Then I'll try to help you."

I have always thought with admiration of his calmness as he looked down at me with a face that said, "I surrender," and a tongue that said:

"May I use your bath-room for one minute?"

"Certainly," was my answer.

He entered the bath-room and closed its door behind him.

I had begun to fear that he might have

THE MARRYERS

rashly decided to jump into eternity from my bath-room when he reappeared with no mustache and a gray beard on his chin. Then, as if by chance, he took my hat and gray summer top-coat from the peg, where they had been hanging, said "Good-by," and walked hurriedly out of my door and down the corridor.

I had hesitated a little between my duty to Mexico and my duty to Norris, but I felt, and rightly, as I believe, that my client should come first, for I am rather human. But how about the reward? I thought. Well, that was none of my funeral. Shorn of his pull, he was now in the thorny path of the fugitive, and so I let him go.

I tried to work, but work was out of the question for me that morning. I went for a walk, and on my return sat down with my paper. Among the items in its cable news was the following:

Whitfield Norris and his family are at the Grand Hotel in Rome. His daughter, Miss Gwendolyn, whose beauty and wealth, as well as her amiable disposition, have attracted many suitors, is said to be engaged to the young Count Carola.

THE MARRYERS

What I said to myself is not one of the things which should appear in a book, and I wish only to suggest enough of it here to put me on record.

Soon after one o'clock I was called to the 'phone by my secretary, who had followed Muggs when he left my room. At the time I gave my man his orders I did not know, of course, how my interview would turn out, and so, with a lawyer's prudence, I had decided to keep track of Muggs. When he settled down or left the city my young man was to report, and so:

"Hello," came his voice on the telephone.

"Hello! What news?" I asked.

"Our friend has just sailed on the *Caronia* for England."

"All right," I said, and then: "Hold on! Find out if there is a fast ship sailing to-night, and if so engage good quarters for two."

I sat down to get my breath.

"How deft and wonderful!" I whispered.

"It takes a good lawyer to keep up with him."

The man was on his way to Italy for another whack at Norris, and I had been thinking that

THE MARRYERS

he was broke. He would resume his philanthropic rôle in Italy and probably scare Norris to death. He had, of course, read that fool item in some paper. There was but one thing for me to do: I must get there first and meet him in the corridor of the Grand Hotel upon his arrival. Fortunately, my business was pretty well cleaned up in preparation for a long rest of which we had been talking.

I telephoned to Betsey that we should probably go abroad that night and that she must get her trunks packed and on the way to the city as soon as possible.

"But my summer clothes are not ready!" she exclaimed.

"Never mind clothes," I answered. "Breechcloths will do until we can get to Europe, and there's any amount of clothing for sale on the other side of the pond. Chuck some things into a couple of trunks and stamp 'em down and come on. We'll meet here at six."

Then I thought of my talk with Gwendolyn, and telephoned to young Forbes and told him that I was going to Italy, and asked:

"Any message to send?"

THE MARRYERS

"Sure," said he. "I'll come down to see you."

"We dine at seven," I said.

"Put on a plate for me," he requested.

I had scarcely hung up the receiver when the bell rang and my secretary notified me that he had engaged a good room on the *Toltec*, and would be at my hotel in twenty minutes.

I went down to the office and wrote a cablegram to Norris, in which I said that we were going over to see the country and would call on him within ten days.

To pay the charges I took out my pocket-book. There was no money in it. What had happened to me? There had been two one-hundred-dollar bills in the book when I had paid for last evening's dinner; now it held nothing but a slip of paper neatly folded. I opened it and read these words written with a pencil:

Thanks. This is the last call.

M.

Then I remembered that yesterday's trousers had been hanging in the bath-room with

THE MARRYERS

my money in the right-hand pocket when Muggs was there. I had got the book and taken it with me when I went for a walk.

"He may be a busted philanthropist, but he's not a busted thief," I mused.

V

IN WHICH WE HAVE AN AMUSING VOYAGE

BETSEY had been a bit disturbed by the swiftness of my plans. On her arrival in town she said to me:

"Look here, Socrates Potter, I'm no longer a colt, and you'll have to drive slower. What are you up to, anyway?"

"A surprise-party!" I answered. "Cheer up! It's our honeymoon trip. I've decided that after a man has married a woman it's his duty to get well acquainted with her. What's the use of having a breastful of love and affection and no time to show it. To begin with we shall have the best dinner this hotel affords."

Our table, which had been well adorned with flowers, awaited us, and we sat down to dinner. Richard Forbes came while we were eating our oysters and joined us.

THE MARRYERS

We talked of many things, and while we were eating our dessert I sailed into the subject nearest my heart by saying:

"I kind o' guessed that you'd want to send a message."

"How did you know it?" he asked.

"Oh, by sundry looks and glances of your eye when I saw you last."

"They didn't deceive you," said he. "Tell them that they may see me in Rome before long. Miss Norris was kind enough to say in a letter that they would be glad to see me. I haven't answered yet. You might gently break the news of my plan and let me know how they stand it."

"I'll give them your affectionate regard—that's as far as I am willing to go—and I'll tell them to prepare for your presence. If they show evidence of alarm I'll let you know. I kind o' mistrust that you may be needed there and—and wanted."

"No joking now!" he warned me.

"Those titled chaps are likely to get after her, and I may want you to help me head 'em off. You'd be a silly feller to let them grab the prize."

THE MARRYERS

"The trouble is my fortune isn't made," said he. "I'm getting along, but I can't afford to get married yet."

"Don't worry about that," I begged him. "Our young men all seem to be thinking about money and nothing else. Quit it. Keep out of this great American thought-trust. Any girl that isn't willing to take hold and help you make your fortune isn't worth having. Don't let the vine of your thoughts go twining around the money-pole. If you do they'll make you a prisoner."

"But she is used to every luxury."

"And probably will be glad to try something new. Her mama is not looking for riches, but noble blood, I suppose. Norris's girl looks good to me—nice way of going, as they used to say of the colts. We ought to be able to offer her as high an order of nobility as there is in Europe."

"I'm very common clay," the boy answered, with a laugh.

"And the molding is up to you," I said, as we rose to go.

"Tell them that Gwendolyn's heart is Amer-

THE MARRYERS

ican territory and that I shall stand for no violation of the Monroe Doctrine," said he.

We bade him good-by and went aboard the steamer in as happy a mood as if we had spent six months instead of six hours getting ready. So our voyage began.

Going over we felt the strong tides of the spirit which carry so many of our countrymen to the Old World. The *Toltec* was crowded with tourists of the All-Europe-in-three-weeks variety. There were others, but these were a small minority. Every passenger seemed to be loaded, beyond the Plimsoll mark, with conversation, and in the ship's talk were all the spiritual symptoms of America.

We chose partners and went into the business of visiting. The sea shook her big, round sides, immensely tickled, I should say, by the gossip. Our ship was a moving rialto. We swapped stories and exchanged sentiments; we traded hopes and secrets; we cranked up and opened the gas-valve and raced into autobiography. Each got a memorable bargain. We were almost dishonest with our generosity.

"Ship ahoy!" we shouted to every man who

THE MARRYERS

came our way and noted his tonnage and cargo, his home port and destination.

How American! God bless us all!

Within forty-eight hours it seemed to me that everybody knew everybody else, except Lord and Lady Dorris, who were aboard, and the adoring group that surrounded them.

The big, wide-world thought-trust was well represented in the smoking-room. There were business men and boys just out of college, all expressing themselves in terms of profit and loss—the wealth of this or that man and how he got it, the effect of legislation upon business, and all that kind of thing. Thirty-five years ago such a company would have been talking of the last speeches of Conkling and Ingersoll or the last poems of Whittier and Tennyson.

There were many keynotes in the conversation. If one sat down with a book in the reading-room he would abandon it for the better display of human nature in the crowd around him. There were some twoscore women all talking at the same time, each drenching the other in the steady flow of her

THE MARRYERS

conversational hose. The plan of it all seemed to be very generous—everybody giving and nobody receiving anything. I used to think that among women talk was for display or relief, and whispering for the transfer of intelligence. Since I got married I know better: women have a sixth sense by which they can acquire knowledge without listening in a talk-fest. They miss nothing.

It was interesting to observe how the edges of the conversations impinged upon one another, like the circles made by a handful of pebbles flung from a bridge into water. Now and then some strong-voiced lady dropped a rock into the pool, and the spatter went to both shores. The spray advertised the thought-trusts of the women:

"I felt so sorry for poor Mabel! There wasn't a young man in the party."

"It was a capital operation, but I pulled through."

"Yes, I've wanted to go to Italy ever since I saw 'Romeo and Juliet.' Those Italians are wonderful lovers."

"It was so ridiculous to be throwing her at

THE MARRYERS

his head, and she with a weak heart and only one lung!"

"I don't know how I spend it, but somehow it goes."

"Oh, they have been abroad, but anybody can do that these days."

"Poor man! I feel sorry for him—she's terribly extravagant."

"We don't see much of our home these days."

"My twentieth trip across the ocean."

"Our children are in boarding-schools, and my husband is living at his club."

I wanted to smoke and excused myself from Betsey and went out on the deck, now more than half deserted, and stood looking off at the night. Family history was pouring out of the state-room windows, and I could not help hearing it. Grandma, slightly deaf, was saying to her daughter:

"Lizzie must be more careful when those young men come to the door. This morning she wasn't half dressed when she opened it."

"Oh yes, she was."

"No, she wasn't; I took particular notice.

THE MARRYERS

And every morning she wets her hair in my perfumery." Then, sadly, "It's almost gone."

I knew enough about the sins of Lizzie, and moved on and took a new stand.

An elderly lumber merchant from Michigan was saying to his companion in a loud voice:

"Yes, I retired ten years ago. I am studying the history of the world—all about the life of the world, especially the life of the ancients."

I moved on to escape a comparison of the careers of Alexander and Napoleon, and settled down in a dusky corner near which a lady was giving an account of the surgical operations which had been performed upon her. So the conversation, which had begun at daybreak, went on into the night. It was all very human—very American.

The Litchmans of Chicago had rooms opposite ours. Every night six or eight pairs of shoes, each decorated with a colored ribbon to distinguish it from the common run of shoes, were ranged in a row outside their door. The lady had forty-two hats—so I was told—and all of them were neatly aired in the course of

THE MARRYERS

the voyage. The upper end of her system was not a head, but a hat-holder.

Their family of four children was established in a room next to ours. As a whole, it was the most harmonious and efficient yelling-machine of which I have any knowledge. Its four cylinders worked like one. At dinner it filled its tanks with cheese and cakes and nuts and jellies and milk, and was thus put into running order for the night. It is wonderful how many yells there are in a relay of cheese and cake and nuts and jelly and milk. When we got in bed the machine cranked up, backed out of the garage, and went shrieking up the hill to midnight and down the slope to breakfast-time, stopping briefly now and then for repairs.

A deaf lady next morning declared that she had heard the fog-whistles blowing all night.

"Fog-whistles! We didn't need 'em," said Betsey.

It was a symptom of America with which I had been unfamiliar.

We were astonished at the number of manless women aboard that ship. Many were much-traveled widows whose husbands had fallen

THE MARRYERS

in the hard battles of American life; some, I doubt not, like the battle of Norris, with hidden worries that feed, like rats, on the strength of a man.

Many of the women were handsome daughters and sleek, well-fed mamas whose husbands could not leave the struggle—often the desperate struggle—for fame and fortune.

There were elderly women—well upholstered grandmamas—generally traveling in pairs.

One of them, a slim, garrulous, and affectionate lady well past her prime, was immensely proud of her feet. She was Mrs. Fraley, from Terre Haute—"a daughter of dear old Missouri," she explained. It seemed that her feet had retained their pristine beauty through all vicissitudes, and been complimented by sundry distinguished observers. One evening she said to Betsey:

"Come down to my state-room, dearest dear, and I will show you my feet."

She always seemed to be seeking astonishment, and was often exclaiming "Indeed!" or "How wonderful!" and I hadn't told any lies either.

THE MARRYERS

We met also Mrs. Mullet, of Sioux City, a gay and copious widow of middle age, who appeared in the ship's concert with dark eyes well underscored to give them proper emphasis. She was a well-favored, sentimental lady with thick, wavy, brown hair. Her thoughts were also a bit wavy, but Betsey formed a high opinion of her. Mrs. Mullet was a neat dresser and resembled a fashion-plate. Her talk was well dressed in English accents. She often looked thoughtfully at my chin when we talked together, as if she were estimating its value as a site for a stand of whiskers. It was her apparent knowledge of art which interested Betsey. She talked art beautiful, as Sam Henshaw used to say, and was going to Italy to study it.

There were schoolma'ams going over to improve their minds, and romping, sweet-faced girls setting out to be instructed in art or music, beyond moral boundaries, and knowing not that they would take less harm among the lions and hyenas of eastern Africa. When will our women learn that the centers of art

THE MARRYERS

and music in Europe are generally the exact centers of moral leprosy?

There were stately, dignified, and inhuman people of the seaboard aristocracy of the East—the Europeans of America, who see only the crudeness of their own land. They have been dehorned—muleyed into freaks by degenerate habits of mind and body. A certain passenger called them the “Eunuchs of democracy,” but I wouldn’t be so intemperate with the truth. One of them was the Lady Dorris, daughter of a New York millionaire, who came out of her own apartments one evening to peer laughingly into the dining-saloon, and say:

“I love to look at them; they’re so very, very curious!”

Yes, we have a few Europeans in America, but I suspect that Europe is more than half American.

Then there was Mr. Pike, the lumber king, from Prairie du Chien, who stroked his whiskers when he talked to me and looked me over from head to toe as if calculating the amount of good timber in me. He had retired, jumped from the lumber business into

THE MARRYERS

ancient history, and was now reporting the latest news from Tyre and Babylon.

In this environment of character we proceeded with nothing to do but observe it, and with no suspicion that we were being introduced to the persons of a drama in which we were to play our parts in Italy.

So now, then, the orchestra has ceased playing and the curtain is up again, and, with all these people on the stage, in the middle of the ocean word goes around the decks that there is a ship off the port side very near us. We look and observe that we are passing her. It is the *Caronia*, and we ride the seas with a better sense of comfort, knowing that Wilton is behind us.



We pass the *Caronia*, and we ride the seas with a better sense of comfort, knowing that Wilton is behind us.

VI

WE ARRIVE IN THE LAND OF LOVE AND SONG

HERE we are in Rome on the tenth day of our journey at three in the afternoon! Jiminy Christmas! How I felt the need of language! I had given my leisure on the train to the careful study of a conversation-book, but the conversation I acquired was not extensive enough to satisfy every need of a man born in northern New England. It was too polite. There were a number of men who quarreled over us and our baggage in the station at Rome, and I had to do all my swearing with the aid of a dictionary. I found it too slow to be of any use. We were rescued soon by Mrs. Norris and her footman, who took us to the Grand Hotel. Gwendolyn met us in the hall of their apartment, and I delivered Forbes's message.

"You may kiss me!" she exclaimed, joyously.

THE MARRYERS

"I do it for him," I said.

"Then do it again," said she.

That's the kind of a girl she was—up and a-coming!—and that's the kind of a man I am—obliging to the point of generosity at the proper moment.

The reputation of the Norrises gave us standing, and we were soon marching in step and sowing our francs in a rattling shower with the great caravan of American blood-hunters.

Norris himself was in better health than I had hoped to find him, and three days later he drove me to Tivoli in his motor-car.

As we were leaving the hotel the porter said to Norris:

"An American gentleman called to see you about an hour ago. He was very urgent, and I told him that I thought you had gone to Tivoli."

"Not gone, but going," said Norris. "There's a grain of truth in what you said, but I suppose you meant well."

He handed the porter a coin and added:

"You must never be able to guess where I am."

THE MARRYERS

In the course of our long ride across the Campagna I made my report and he made his. I told the whole story of Muggs and how at length the man had given me a good, full excuse for my play-spell.

"I suppose that he will be after us again here," said Norris.

"Don't worry," I answered; "you'll find me a capable watch-dog. It will only be necessary for me to bark at him once or twice."

"You're an angel of mercy," said my friend. "I couldn't bear the sight of him now. It isn't the money involved; it's his devilish smoothness and the twitch of the bull-ring and the peril I am in of losing my temper and of doing something to—to be regretted."

"Let me be secretary of your interior also," I proposed, and added: "I can get mad enough for both of us, and I have a growing stock of cuss words."

My assurance seemed to set Norris at rest, and I called for his report.

"Mine is a longer story," he began. "First we went to Saint Moritz—beautiful place, six

THE MARRYERS

thousand feet up in the mountains—and it agreed with me. We found two kinds of Americans there—the idle rich who came to play with the titled poor and the homeless. Everywhere in Europe one finds homeless people from our country—a wandering, pathetic tribe of well-to-do gipsies. Among the idle rich are maidens with great prospects and planning mamas, and rich widows looking for live noblemen with the money of dead grocers, rum merchants, and contractors. They're all searching for 'blood,' as they call it.

“‘I can't marry an American,’ one of them said to me; ‘I want a man of blood. These men are of ancient families that have made history, and they know how to make love, too.’

“Impoverished dukes, marquises, princes, barons, counts, from the purlieus of aristocratic Europe, throng about them. These noblemen are professional marryers, and all for sale. The bob-sled and the toboggan are implements of their craft, symbols of the rapid pace. Unfortunately, they are often the meeting-place of youthful innocence and utter depravity, of

THE MARRYERS

glowing health and incurable disease. Maidens and marquises, barons and widows, counts and young married women, traveling alone, sit dove-tailed on bob-sleds and toboggans, and, locked in a complex embrace, this tangle of youth and beauty, this interwoven mass of good and evil, rushes down the slippery way. In the swift, curving flight, by sheer hugging, they overcome the tug of centrifugal force. It is a long hug and a strong hug. Thus, courtship is largely a matter of sliding.

“Then there are the dances. I do not need to describe them. At Saint Moritz they go to the limit. Fifteen years ago when Chuck Connors and his friends practised these dances in a Bowery dive respectable citizens turned away with disgust. Since then the idle rich who explore the underworld have begun to imitate its dances, which were intended to suggest the morals of the dog-kennel and the farm-yard and which have achieved some success in that direction. Unfortunately, the idle rich are well advertised. If they were to wear rings in their noses the practice would soon become fashionable.

THE MARRYERS

"Well, you see, it was no place for my girl. I sent her away with Mrs. Mushtop to Rome, but not until a young Italian count had got himself in love with my money."

"Count Carola?" I asked.

"Count Carola!" said he. "How did you know?"

"Saw it in the paper."

"The paper!" he exclaimed. "God save us from the papers as well as from war, pestilence, and sudden death."

"Is the count really shot in the heart?" I ventured to ask.

"Oh, he likes her as any man likes a pretty, bright-eyed girl," Norris went on, "but it was a part of my money that he wanted most. I had kept her out of that crowd, and the young man hadn't met her. He had only stood about and stared at us, and had finally asked for an introduction to me, which I refused, greatly to my wife's annoyance. The young man followed them to Rome, but I didn't know that he had done so until I got there. They went around seeing things, and everywhere they went the count was sure to go. Followed them

THE MARRYERS

like a dog, day in and day out. Isn't that making it a business? His eyes were on them in every room of every art-gallery. One day, when they stood with some friends near the music-stand in the Pincio Gardens, the count approached Mrs. Mushtop. You know Mrs. Mushtop; she is a good woman, but a European at heart and a worshiper of titles. I didn't suppose that she was such a romantic old saphead of a woman. This is what happened: the count took off his hat and greeted her with great politeness. She was a little flattered. My daughter turned away.

"I suspect, myself, that you are the young lady's chaperon," said he.

"Yes, sir."

"I am in love with the beautiful, charming young lady. It is so joyful for me to look at her. I am most unhappy unless I am near her. I have the honor to hand you my card; I wish you to make the inquiry about my family and my character. Then I hope that you will permit me to speak to her."

"Think of Mrs. Mushtop standing there and letting him go on to that extent."

THE MARRYERS

"She said, 'It would do no good, for I believe that she is engaged.'

"That will make not any difference,' he insisted, with true Italian simplicity; 'I will take my chances.'

"She foolishly kept his card, but had the good sense to turn away and leave him.

"Mrs. Norris went on to Rome for a few days while I stayed at Saint Moritz with my physician, mother, and secretary. You know women better than I do, probably. Most of them like that Romeo business; that swearing by the sun, moon, and stars—those cosmic, cross-universe measurements of love. I don't know as I blame them, for, after all, a woman's happiness is so dependent on the love of a husband.

"Well, those women got their heads together, and my wife thought that, on the whole, she liked the looks of the count. He was rather slim and dusky, but he had big, dark eyes and red cheeks and perfect teeth and a fine bearing. So they drove to Florence, where he lived, and investigated his pedigree and character. It was a very old

THE MARRYERS

family, which had played an important part in the campaigns of Mazzini and Cavour, but its estate had been confiscated after the first failure of the great Lombard chief, and its fortunes were now at a low ebb. One of the count's brothers is the head waiter in a hotel at Naples. He had sense enough to go to work, but the count is a confirmed gentleman who rests on hopes and visions. He reminds me of a house standing in the air with no visible means of support.

"However, the investigation was satisfactory to my wife, and she invited the young man to dinner at her hotel. The ladies were all captivated by his charm, and there's no denying that the young fellow has pretty manners. It's great to see him garnish a cup of tea or a plate of spaghetti with conversation. His talk is pastry and bonbons.

"When I came on I found them going about with him and having a fine time. Under his leadership my wife had visited sundry furniture and antique shops and invested some five thousand dollars, on which, I presume, the count received commissions sufficient to keep

THE MARRYERS

him in spending-money for a while. I didn't like the count, and told them so. He's too effeminate for me—hasn't the frank, upstanding, full-breasted, rugged, ready-for-anything look of our American boys. But I didn't interfere; I kept my hands off, for long ago I promised to let my wife have her way about the girl. That reminds me we have invited young Forbes to come over and spend a month with us."

"Likely young fellow," I said.

"None better," said he; "if he had sense enough to ask Gwen to marry him I'd be glad of it. I have refused to encourage the affair with the count, but we find it hard to saw him off. We drove to Florence the other day, and he followed us there and back again. He's a comer, I can tell you; we can see him coming wherever we are. I swear a little about it now and then, and Gwen says, 'Well, father, you don't own the road.' And Mrs. Norris will say: 'Poor fellow! Isn't it pitiful? I'm so sorry for him!'

"His devotion to business is simply amazing—works early and late, and don't mind going

THE MARRYERS

hungry. In all my life I never saw anything like it."

We had arrived at Tivoli, and as he ceased speaking we drew up at Hadrian's Villa and entered the ruins with a crowd of American tourists. An energetic lady dogged the steps of the swift-moving guide with a volley of questions which began with, "Was it before or after Christ?" By and by she said: "I wouldn't like to have been Mrs. Hadrian. Think of covering all these floors with carpets and keeping them clean!"

I left Norris sitting on a broken column and went on with the crowd for a few minutes. I kept close to the energetic lady, being interested in her talk. Suddenly she began to hop up and down on one leg and gasp for breath. I never saw a lady hopping on one leg before, and it alarmed me. The battalion of sight-seers moved on; they seemed to be unaware of her distress—or was it simply a lack of time? I stopped to see what I could do for her.

"Oh, my lord! My heavens!" she shouted, as she looked at me, with both hands on her

THE MARRYERS

lifted thigh. "I've got a cramp in my leg! I've got a cramp in my leg!"

I supported the lady and spoke a comforting word or two. She closed her eyes and rested her head on my arm, and presently put down her leg and looked brighter.

"There, it's all right now," said she, with a shake of her skirt. "Thanks! Do you come from Michigan?"

"No."

"Where do you hail from?"

"Pointview, Connecticut."

"I'm from Flint, Michigan, and I'm just tuckered out. They keep me going night and day. I'm making a collection of old knockers. Do you suppose there are any shops where they keep 'em here?"

"Don't know. I'm just a pilgrim and a stranger and am not posted in the knocker trade," I answered.

The crowd had turned a corner; and with a swift good-by she ran after it, fearful, I suppose, of losing some detail in the domestic life of Hadrian.

So on one leg, as it were, she enters and

THE MARRYERS

swiftly crosses the stage. It's a way Providence has of preparing us for the future. To this moment's detention I was indebted for an adventure of importance, for as she left me I saw Muggs, the sleek, pestiferous Muggs, coming out of the old baths on his way to the gate. He must have been the man who had called to see Norris that morning. He turned pale with astonishment and nodded.

"Well, Muggs, here you are," I said.

He handled himself in a remarkable fashion, for he was as cool as a cucumber when he answered:

"I used to resemble a lot of men, and some pretty decent fellows used to resemble me, but as soon as they saw me they quit it—got out from under, you know. Even my photographs have quit resembling me."

"Well, you have changed a little; but my hat and overcoat look just about as they did," I laughed.

"If I didn't know it was impossible I would say that your name was Potter," said he.

"And if I knew it was impossible I would swear that your name was Muggs," I answered.

THE MARRYERS

"Forget it," said he; "in the name of God, forget it. I'm trying to live honest, and I'm going to let you and your friends alone if you'll let me alone. Now, that's a fair bargain."

I hesitated, wondering at his sensitiveness.

"You owe us quite a balance, but I'm inclined to call it a bargain," I said. "Only be kind to that hat and coat; they are old friends of mine. I don't care so much about the two hundred dollars."

"Thanks," he answered with a laugh, and went on: "I've given you proper credit on the books. You'll hear from me as soon as I am on my feet."

"What are you doing here?" I asked.

He answered: "Ever since I was a kid I've wanted to see the Colosseum where men fought with lions."

"I am sure that you would enjoy a look at Hadrian's Walk," I said, pointing to the tourists who had halted there as I turned away.

So we parted, and with a sense of good luck I hurried to Norris.

THE MARRYERS

"I've got a crick in my back," I said.
"Let's get out of here."

We proceeded to our motor-car at the entrance.

"This ruin is the most infamous relic in the world," said Norris, as we got into our car; "it stands for the grandeur of pagan hoggishness. Think of a man who wanted all the treasures and poets and musicians and beauties in the world for the exclusive enjoyment of himself and friends. Millions of men gave their lives for the creation of this sublime swine-yard. Hadrian's Villa, and others like it, broke the back of the empire. I tell you, the world has changed, and chiefly in its sense of responsibility for riches. Here in Italy you still find the old feudal, hog theory of riches, which is a thing of the past in America and which is passing in England. We have a liking for service. I tell you, Potter, my daughter ought to marry an American who is strong in the modern impulses, and go on with my work."

VII

IN WHICH I TEACH THE DIFFICULT ART OF BEING AN AMERICAN IN ITALY

NORRIS had overtaxed himself in this ride to Tivoli and spent the next day in his hotel.

"My conversation often has this effect," I said, as I sat by his bedside. "Forty miles of it is too much without a sedative. You need the assistance of the rest of the family. Let Gwendolyn and her mother take a turn at listening."

"That's exactly what I propose. I want you to look after them," he said. "They need me now if they ever did, and I'm a broken reed. Be a friend to them, if you can."

I liked Norris, for he was bigger than his fortune, and you can't say that of every millionaire. Not many suspect how a lawyer's heart can warm to a noble client. I would have gone through fire and water for him.

THE MARRYERS

"If they can stand it I can," was my answer. "A good many people have tried my friendship and chucked it overboard. It's like swinging an ax, and not for women. One has to have regular rest and good natural vitality to stand my friendship."

"They have just stood a medical examination," he went on. "I want you and Mrs. Potter to see Rome with Gwendolyn and her mother and give them your view of things. Be their guide and teacher. I hope you may succeed in building up their Americanism, but if you conclude to turn them into Italians I shall be content."

"There are many things I can't do, but you couldn't find a more willing professor of Americanism," I declared.

So it happened that Betsey and I went with Gwendolyn and her mother for a drive.

I am not much inclined to the phrases of romance. Being a lawyer, I hew to the line. But I have come to a minute when my imagination pulls at the rein as if it wanted to run away. I remember that an old colonial lawyer refers in one of his complaints to "a most

THE MARRYERS

comely and winsome mayd who with ribbands and slashed sleeves and snug garments and stockings well knit and displayed and sundry glances of her eye did wickedly and unlawfully work upon this man until he forgot his duty to his God, his state, and his family," and it is on record that this "winsome mayd" was condemned to sit in the bilboes.

The tall, graceful, blue-eyed, blond-haired girl, opposite whom I sat in the motor-car that day, was both comely and winsome. She innocently "worked upon" the opposite sex until one member of it got to work upon me, and I'm not the kind that goes around looking for trouble. Even when it looks for me it often fails to find me.

I am a man rather firmly set in my way and well advanced upon it, but I have to acknowledge that Gwendolyn's face kept reminding me of the best days of my boyhood, when life itself was like a rose just opened, and the smile of Betsey was morning sunlight. Backed by great wealth, its effect upon the marryers of Italy can be imagined.

Gwendolyn had survived the three deadly

THE MARRYERS

perils of girlhood—cake, candy, and the soda-fountain. A pony and saddle and good air to breathe helped her to win the fight until she went to school in Munich, where a wise matron and the spirit of the school induced her to climb mountains and eat meat and vegetables and other articles in the diet of the sane. Now she was a strong, red-cheeked, full-blooded young lady of twenty. In spite of the stanch Americanism of Norris, Gwendolyn and her mother were full of European spirit. They liked democracy, but they loved the pomp and splendor of courts, and the sound of titles, and the glitter of swords and uniforms. As we got into the car we observed numbers of young men staring at us, and I spoke of it, and Gwendolyn said to me:

“I think that the young men in America are better-looking, but they are so cold! All the girls tell me that these boys can beat them making love, and I believe it.”

“But most of our boys have work to do,” I said. “With them love-making is only a side issue, and it often comes at the end of a long,

THE MARRYERS

hard day. These Italians seem to have nothing else to do but make love."

"I don't see, for my part, why men who have plenty of money should have to work," said Mrs. Norris. "What's the use of having money if it doesn't give you leisure for enjoyment?"

"But leisure is like dynamite—you have to be careful with it," I said. "For most of us it's the only danger. All deviltry begins in leisure and ends in work, if at all. Being naturally sinful, I don't fool with it much. Of course you women are moral giants, and you don't need to be so scared of it."

"You have to joke about everything," said Mrs. Norris. "Sometimes I think that I understand you and suddenly you begin joking, and then I lose confidence in all you have said."

"I mean all I say and then some more," I declared. "I assume that you are moral giants or that you do a lot of work secretly. No *man* could keep his footing in the slippery path of unending leisure. In Europe leisure is the aim of all, and where it most abounds morality is a joke. Here blood and leisure are

THE MARRYERS

the timber of which all ladies and gentlemen are made. In America we know that it's rotten timber. We have discovered three great commandments. They are written not only on tablets of stone, but everywhere. If they were printed across the sky they couldn't be any plainer. You know them as well as I do."

The three ladies turned serious eyes upon me and shook their heads.

Then I shot my bolt at them:

"They are:

"1. Get busy.

"2. Keep busy.

"3. See that it pays, which means that you are to play as well as work."

Mrs. Norris smiled and nimbly stepped out of my way and bravely answered, like a real rococo aristocrat:

"I fear that you are prejudiced. I should be proud to have my daughter marry into one of these old families, not hastily, of course, but after we have found the right man. There are splendid men in some of them, and your best Italian is a most devoted husband. He worships his wife."

THE MARRYERS

"And if you're looking for a worshiper you couldn't find a place where the arts of worship have been so highly developed," I answered. "But no American girl should be looking for a worshiper unless she's under the impression that she created the world, and even then a doctor would do her more good. Of course Gwendolyn would prefer a man, and what's the matter with one of your own countrymen—Forbes, for instance?"

"I couldn't pass his examination—too difficult!" said Gwendolyn, with a laugh. "I think that he is looking for a world-beater—a girl who could win the first prize in a golf tournament or a beauty show or a competition in mathematics. What chance have I? He thinks that he has got to be a rich man before he gets married. What chance has he?"

Clearly she wanted me to know that she liked him and resented his apparent indifference. I suppose that he had not fallen down before her, as other boys had done, and she could not quite make him out. Probably that's why she preferred him.

"He has wonderful self-possession," I said.

THE MARRYERS

"Yes, he'll never let go of himself. All the girls say that about him. He's a wise youngster."

"If he were in my place I don't believe he could hold out through the day," I declared.

"She does look well, doesn't she?" said Mrs. Norris, as she proudly surveyed her daughter. "Italy agrees with her, and she loves it and the people."

"So do I," was my answer. "The Italian people, who are doing the work of Italy, are admirable. Out in the vineyards you will find young men who are even good enough for Gwendolyn. It's these idle horse-traders that I object to—these fellows who are trying to swap a case of spavined respectability for a fortune."

"Oh, you're a mountain of prejudice!" Mrs. Norris exclaimed. "Now, there's the Princess Carrero. She was an American girl, and she is the happiest, proudest woman in Italy. Her husband is one of the finest gentlemen I ever met."

"He's a dear!" Gwendolyn echoed.

"For my part I think that international marriages are a fine thing," Mrs. Norris went

THE MARRYERS

on. "They are drawing the races together into one brotherhood."

"But such a brotherhood will be hard on our sisterhood," I objected. "A wife here is the chief hired girl. Often if she doesn't mind she gets licked, and if she's an American she must always pay the bills."

We had come to the great church of St. Paul, beyond the ancient walls of the city. There we left our car and passed through a crowd of insistent beggars to enter its door. We shivered in our wraps under the great, golden ceiling high above our heads. Its towering columns and pilasters looked like sculptured ice. It was all so cold!

"It doesn't seem right," I said to Mrs. Norris, "that one should get a chill in the house of God."

"Keep cool ought to be good advice for Christians," said Betsey.

"But coldness and hospitality are bad companions," I insisted. "Chilling grandeur a people might reasonably expect from their king; but is it the thing for a prodigal returning to his father's house?"

THE MARRYERS

"But isn't it beautiful?"

Mrs. Norris wished me to agree, and I shocked her by saying:

"Beautiful, but too much like kings' palaces. The Golden House of Nero was just this kind of thing, and it's on record that Jesus Christ had no taste for show and glitter. I believe He called it vanity."

Mrs. Norris wore a look of surprise. The old horse called Honesty took the bit in his teeth then and fairly ran away with me.

"The whole difference between Europe and America is in this building," I said. "We no longer believe in kings or kings' palaces in heaven or upon earth. With most of us God has ceased to be an emperor rejoicing in pomp and splendor and adulation. We find that He likes better to dwell in a cabin and a humble heart. We do not believe that he cares for the title of king. We do not believe that there are any titles in heaven."

At this point I observed a look of astonishment in the face of Mrs. Norris, so I suddenly closed the tap of my thoughts.

Was it my philosophy? No, it was Muggs

THE MARRYERS

who lifted his hat (or rather my hat) as he passed us with the sentimental Mrs. Mullet clinging to his arm.

"Don't notice him," Mrs. Norris whispered to her daughter, as both turned away. "It's that odious Wilton who used to come and see father."

I wondered how it was going to be possible for me to rescue Mrs. Mullet under the circumstances of our covenant of non-interference. We turned and left this splendid memorial to the great apostle Paul.

Count Carola was waiting for us at the step of the car, and kissed the hands of Mrs. Norris and Gwendolyn, and assisted them to their seats. I was presented to him, and am forced to say that I didn't like the cut of his jib. Still, I'm very particular about jibs, especially the jib of a new boat.

"Poor dear boy!" Mrs. Norris exclaimed, as we drove away. "There's a lover for you!"

"He grows handsomer every day," said Gwendolyn, in a low, lyrical tone.

"It's his suffering," Mrs. Norris half moaned.

THE MARRYERS

"Do you really think so?" the young lady sympathized.

"Hold on, Juliet!" said I. "If I were you I'd shoo him off the balcony. He's a perfect lily of a man, but he won't do—too generous, too devoted! We have men like him in America. There their titles are never mentioned in the best society, and their persons are often cruelly injured. For a badge of rank they have adopted a kind of liver-pad which they wear often over one eye or the other. Of course on Broadway they haven't the romantic environment of Italy, and are subject to all kinds of violence."

Mrs. Norris flashed a glance of surprise at me.

"You are a cruel iconoclast," said she. "He belongs to one of the best families in Italy."

"And if I were you I'd let him continue to belong to it; at least, I wouldn't want to buy him. He acts like a book-agent or a seller of lightning-rods, or a train-boy with his chocolates and chewing-gum. He won't take 'No' for an answer. He keeps tossing his wares

THE MARRYERS

into your laps and seems to say: 'For God's sake, think of my starving family and make me some kind of an offer.' Do you think that compares in dignity with the self-possession of Richard?"

The ladies exchanged glances. Gwendolyn laughed and blushed. Mrs. Norris smiled. I went on:

"He defaces the landscape like the portraits of the late Mr. Mennen in America. He shows up everywhere as an advertisement for his own charms.



"That's his legend."

"It's just a little ridiculous, isn't it?" said the girl.

"Oh, the poor boy is in love!" Mrs. Norris

THE MARRYERS •

pleaded, in a begging, purring tone which said, plainly enough, "Of course you are right, but every boy is a fool when he is in love, isn't he?"

"So is Richard in love," I boldly declared for him, "but he isn't on the bargain-counter; he isn't damaged, shop-worn, or out of date; he hasn't been marked down."

Two pairs of eyes stared at mine with a prying gaze.

Gwendolyn leaned forward and grasped my hand.

"Who in the world is he in love with?" she asked, eagerly. "Tell me at once."

"Himself!" Mrs. Norris exclaimed, before I could answer.

"No; with Gwendolyn," I ventured.

Both seemed to relax suddenly, and their backs touched the upholstery.

"I haven't a doubt of it," was my firm assertion.

The fair maid leaned toward me again.

"You misguided man!" she exclaimed.

"Why do you think that?"

"For many reasons and—*one*."

"What is the *one*?" Gwendolyn asked.

THE MARRYERS

"That is my last shot, and I am not going to throw it away. It's worth something, and if you get it you'll have to pay for it."

"You cruel wretch!" she said, with a stinging slap on my hand. "What then are your *many* reasons?"

"They are all in this phrase, 'sundry glances of the eye.'"

"How disappointing you are!"

"And what a spoiled child you are!" I retorted. "Ever since you began to walk you have had about everything that you asked for. The magic lamp of Aladdin was in your hands. You had only to wish and to have. Of course you don't think that you can keep on doing that. You'll soon see that the best things come hard; they have to be earned, and I guess Dick Forbes is one of them. He doesn't seem to be looking for money; what he wants is a real woman. He can love, and with great tenderness and endurance. He's a long-distance lover. His love will keep right along with you to the last. He doesn't go around singing about it with a guitar; he doesn't burst the dam of his affection to inundate an

THE MARRYERS

heiress and swear that all the contents of the infinite skies are in his little flood. That kind of thing doesn't go down any longer; it's out of date. With us it's gone the way of the wig and the crown and the knight and the noisome intrigue and the tallow dip and the brush harrow. We know it's mostly mush, twaddle, and mendacity. Here in Europe you will still find the brush harrow, the tallow dip, and the tallow lover, but not in our land. If you get Richard Forbes you'll have to go into training and try to satisfy his ideals, but it will be worth while."

The ladies changed color a little and sat with looks of thoughtful embarrassment, as if they had on their hands a white elephant whose playfulness had both amused and alarmed them. Twice Betsey and Gwendolyn had broken into laughter, but Mrs. Norris only smiled and looked surprised.

"Perhaps you could tell me what his ideals are," said Gwendolyn.

Our arrival at the Borghese galleries saved me. We immediately entered them and resumed the study of art. Nothing there inter-

THE MARRYERS

ested me so much as the busts of the old emperors. What a lot of human shoats they must have been! Idleness and overeating had created the imperial type of human architecture—eyes set in fat, massive jowls, great necks that seemed to rise to the tops of their heads. With them the title business began to thrive. It was nothing more or less than a license to prey on other people. No wonder that every other man's life was in danger while they lived.

What modesty was theirs! When a man became emperor he caused a statue of himself to be made as father of all the gods. It was probably not so large as he felt, but as large as the rocks would allow—only some fifteen feet high. It was the beginning of the bust and the portrait craze.

We passed from the hall of shoats to the picture-galleries.

I have read of what Beaudelaire calls "the beauty disease," and there is no place where the young may be more sure of getting it than in these Old-World art-galleries. Gwendolyn and her mother had a mild attack of this

THE MARRYERS

disease, "this lust of the art faculties which eats up the moral like a cancer." The monstrous excesses of the idle rich are symptoms of its progress. In Europe the church, the aristocracy, and the art students have caught the fever of it.

"How lovely! How tender!" said Gwendolyn, as we stood before the Danaë of Correggio."

"How lovely! How tenderloin!" I echoed, by way of an antitoxin.

Here was a fifteenth-century ideal of female attractiveness radiating an utterly morbid sensuality. The picture reeked and groaned with passion.

Young men and women from towns and villages in our land who sat industriously copying the works of old masters were turning money newly made in Zanesville, Keokuk, Cedar Rapids, and like places into weird imitations of Correggio, Titian, and Botticelli. Well, I expect that they were having a good time, but I would rather see them copying the tints and forms of nature near their own doors than worshipping the kings of art, which is another form of the title craze.

THE MARRYERS

Here we met again the elderly lady with the beautiful feet who had crossed on our steamer—Mrs. Fraley from Terre Haute. She presented Betsey and me to Miss Muriel Fraley, her grandniece, a good-looking miss of about twenty-three, who was copying the *Danaë*. Mrs. Fraley had found new and delightful astonishments in Italy, the chief of which was this Europeanized niece. She drew me aside and whispered:

“She is a lovely child! Just notice the aristocratic pose of her head.”

I allowed that I could see it, for I had to, and ran my mental hand into the grab-bag for something to say and pulled out:

“I like that blond hair—of—hers.”

I observed, as the girl looked up, that her cheeks were just a bit too red and that her eyes had been slightly emphasized. They did not need it, either, for they were capital eyes to start with.

“And she is as good as she is beautiful,” the old lady went on, in a low tone of strict confidence. “And, you know, since she came here a real count has made love to her.”

THE MARRYERS

"A count!" I exclaimed.

There was a touch of awe in her tone as she said, "Belongs to one of the oldest families in Italy!"

I cleared my throat and thought of death and funerals and comic supplements and such mournful things for safety.

"I want you to meet him at dinner," the good soul went on. "Where are you stopping?"

"At the Grand Hotel."

"We are near there, at the Pension Pirroni. You and Mrs. Potter must dine with us."

I gradually separated myself from Mrs. Fraley and hastened to join my friends. I found them with startled looks in a group of the ancient marble gods and others who lived before the invention of trousers.

"If I were to assume the license of Hercules and stand up here on a pedestal, what do you suppose they'd do to me?" I whispered to Betsey.

"You're no work of art!" said she.

"No, I'm a man, and better than any imitation of a man, for when a lady came into the

THE MARRYERS

room I should jump down and hide in some sarcophagus."

I left them with the poetic cattle of Olympus and went on and asked them to look for me at the door. I lingered awhile with the lovely figures of Canova and Bernini, and was glad at last to get out of the chilly atmosphere of the gallery.

I found the count at the door. He approached me and said, in broken English:

"The ladies, I suppose, they are yet inside now."

I saw my chance and took advantage of it.

"Why do you follow them?"

"Because I have the hope for good devil-*op*-ments."

His "*devil-op-ments*" amused me, and I could not help laughing.

"Ah, Signore, I have very much troubley in my harrit," he added.

"And you will have trouble in other parts of your system if you do not go away," I said. "If you follow these ladies again I shall ask the police to protect us. If they cannot keep

THE MARRYERS

you away I shall injure you in some manner, or hire a boy to do it.

"What! You cannot achieve it!" he answered, in some heat. "You have given me the insults. I shall implore my friend to call on you."

"Send him along," I said, as he hurried away.

The ladies came out presently, and I observed that Gwendolyn and her mother seemed to miss the count.

"He's discouraged, poor thing!" said Mrs. Norris, as we drove away.

VIII

I AGREE TO FIGHT A DUEL AND NAME A WEAPON
WITH WHICH EUROPEAN GENTLEMEN
ARE UNFAMILIAR

THE count's friend called to see me that evening, as I expected. He was a very good-looking young fellow who had more humor and better English than the count. He was a Frenchman of the name of Vincent Aristide de Langueville. Betsey had gone to the opera with Mrs. Norris and Gwendolyn. I was alone.

"For my friend, the Count Carola, I have the honor to ask you to name the day and the weapons," he said, with politeness, before he had sat down.

Now I was in for it. After all, I thought for traveling with an heiress in this country one needs a suit of armor.

"I'm a born fighter," I said, "but almost

THE MARRYERS

always my weapons have been words. They are the only weapons with which I am thoroughly familiar. I propose that we have a talking-match. Put us, say, ten paces apart and light the fuse and get back out of the way while we explode. We'll load the guns with Italian, if he prefers it, and I'll give him the first shot. After ten minutes you can carry him off the field. He'll be severely wounded, but it won't hurt him any."

Vincent Aristide de Languenville laughed a little and said:

"But, my dear sir, this is not one joke. We desire the satisfaction."

"And I will guarantee it," was my answer.

"But, sir, we must have the fight until the blood comes."

"Ah, you are looking for blood also," I said.

"Well, I have thought of another weapon which once upon a time I could handle with some skill. Let's have a duel with pitchforks."

"Pitchforks! What is it?" he asked. "I do not understand."

"It's a favorite weapon in New England. My great-grandfather fought the Indians and

THE MARRYERS

the British with it, and it was one of the weapons with which I fought against poverty when I was a boy. It's a great blood-letter. I used to kill coons and hedgehogs with the pitchfork."

"Please tell me what it is. What *is* it?" he pleaded.

With my pencil I drew a picture of it and said: "This handle is about five feet in length and very strong. These three prongs are of steel and curved a little and long enough to go through the abdomen of the most prosperous mayor in France."

"My God! It is the devil's weapon!" he exclaimed.

"You may report to him that the American pitchfork is the '*devil-op-ment*' of our interview, and I shall name the day and hour as soon as I can get hold of the weapon."

"I shall tell my friend, and, please, may I take the picture with me?" said Vincent.

"Certainly, and you may say to him that I shall cable for the forks to-night, and that as soon as they arrive I shall appoint the day and hour."

THE MARRYERS

He gave me his card.

"You live here in Rome?" I asked.

"I do."

"Do you work for a living?"

"I am a sculptor."

"I have often thought that I should like to see a sculptor. Sit down till I get you framed and hung in my portrait-gallery."

"I must go," said he. "Perhaps you will do me the honor to call."

I agreed to do so, just to show that I entertained no grudge, and with that he left me.

Before going to bed that night I cabled to my secretary as follows:

"Ship to me immediately four well-made American pitchforks, three tines each."

I said nothing to Betsey of the proposed duel, but broke the news that I had met a great sculptor, and she wanted to see his studio, and next day we called there. Mrs. Mullet was sitting for a bust, in her dinner gown. Before we had had time to recognize the lady the artist had introduced her as the Madame Mulette, from Sioux City.

"Isn't this an adorable place?" she asked

THE MARRYERS

in that lyrical tone which one hears so often in the Italian capital. She pointed at busts of several Americans standing on pedestals and awaiting delivery.

"Look at the whiskers embalmed in marble!" Betsey exclaimed, as she gazed at one of the busts. It had that familiar chin tuft of the Zimmermann hay-seed and a dish collar and string tie. The face wore the brave, defiant, me-against-the-world look that I had observed in the statue of Titus, made after he had turned Palestine into a slaughter-house.

"Why, that is our old friend from Prairie du Chien who came over on the *Toltec*," I said. "You remember the man who is studying the history of the world, all about the life of the world, especially the life of the ancients?"

"Yes, indeed," said Betsey.

"He is one lumber king, and one very rich man," the artist remarked.

"You are spending some time here in Rome," I said to Mrs. Mullet.

"Oh, I am devoted to the Eternal City!" she exclaimed, and how she loved the sound of that musty old phrase "Eternal City"! She

THE MARRYERS

added, "I have been here four times, and I love every inch of it."

The sculptor resumed his work with a new sitter, while Mrs. Mullet went with us from end to end of the great studio and whispered at the first opportunity:

"De Languerville is a wonderful man; he is a baron in his own country. If you want a bust he will let you pay for it in instalments. Five hundred dollars down and the remainder within three years."

The hectic flush of art for Heaven's sake was in her face.

"A bust is a good thing," I said. "I have often dreamed of having one. There are times when I feel as if I couldn't live without it. If I had a bust where I could look at it every day I suppose it would take some of the conceit out of me. When I had stood it as long as possible I could tie a rope around its neck and use it for an anchor on my row-boat."

"Perhaps it would scare the fish," said Betsey.

"In that case I could use it to hold down the

THE MARRYERS

pork in the brine of the family barrel," I suggested.

"Oh, I think that you would sculp beautifully," said Mrs. Mullet, in a tone of encouragement, as she looked at my head. Then, by way of changing the subject, she added, "I believe that Colonel Wilton is a friend of yours."

"Colonel Wilton!" I said, puzzling over the name with its new title. Even the American gentlemen enjoy titles.

"Don't you remember meeting us in Saint Paul's? And didn't you trade hats and coats with him in New York?"

"No, he traded with me," I said. "I know him like a book."

"Is he not a friend of yours?"

"It would be truer to say that I am a friend of his."

I was on dangerous ground and thinking hard through all this.

"But he knows Mr. Norris very well. I believe they are great friends."

"You may believe it, but I don't," I answered, rather gravely.

THE MARRYERS

I had to decide what to do, and quickly. I had not forgotten my promise to let Muggs alone, and it was of course the safer thing to do—just to let him alone. But he had gone too far in expecting me to furnish him a character.

Mrs. Mullet began to change color, and that led me to ask:

“Is Wilton a friend of yours?”

“We are engaged,” said she.

“Good heavens!” I exclaimed.

I had heard that Mrs. Mullet had money, and she was good game for the neat Mr. Wilton. Now I could see his reason for letting us alone in Italy, where he was four thousand miles from danger. I saw, too, that I must take a course which would inevitably expose us to more trouble, for I could not permit this simple woman to be wronged.

“Don’t give him the source of your information,” I said. “I want to speak kindly, and so I shall only say that he’s a fugitive from justice. The name Wilton is assumed.”

Mrs. Mullet fell into a chair and seemed to find it hard work to breathe. Betsey put

THE MARRYERS

her smelling-salts under the lady's nose. She quickly regained her self-possession and rose and said, in a trembling voice:

"Thank you! I am going home."

She left, and again we paid our compliments to the artist, who politely left his work to speak with us. He asked me for information regarding certain Americans who owed him for busts. An actress had had herself put, life-size and nude, into white marble, and after making her first payment was maintaining a discreet silence in some part of the world unknown to the artist.

"How coy!" Betsey exclaimed as she looked at the marble figure.

A Brooklyn woman and her two daughters had sat for busts and then had weakened on the general proposition and abandoned the country when they were half finished. I made haste to depart for fear that he might wish to engage me as collector for his bust factory.

Just beyond the door we met a young man who had come over on the boat with us, and stopped for a word with him. — I was telling

THE MARRYERS

him that I was going to see the Pantheon that afternoon, when Muggs greeted me.

"It's a wonderful ruin," he remarked with a smile.

I made no answer, and he entered the studio, probably to meet Mrs. Mullet. He would get his dismissal soon. Then what?

IX

A MODERN AMERICAN MARRYER ENTERS THE SCENE

I HAVE read that there are no fairies in Italy, but I know better. Italy is full of them, and they are the most light-footed, friendly, impartial, democratic fairies in the world. They are liable to make friends with anybody. Like many Italians, they seem to live mostly on the foreign population. A number of them adopted me for a residence. Sometimes, when they were playful, they made me feel like a winter resort. They used to enjoy tobogganing down the slopes of my shoulders and digging their toes in the snow; they held games here and there on my person, which seemed to be well attended. I got a glimpse of one of them now and then, and we became acquainted with each other; and, while he was very shy, I am sure that he knew and

THE MARRYERS

liked me. I called him Oberon. He and his kin did me a great service, for they taught me why people move their arms and shrug their shoulders so much in Italy. Then, too, I always had company wherever I happened to be.

So when Betsey and the Norris ladies implored me to go with them to Mrs. Dorsey's palace and hear a prince lecture, I reported that I was engaged to play with the fairies, whereupon they concluded that I wanted the time for meditation and left me out of their plans. So it happened that I was, fortunately, alone with Norris when Forbes arrived, a full day ahead of his schedule.

The boy and I went out for a walk together.

Before sailing he had spent two weeks coaching the ball-team of his college and was in fine form. His [kindly blue eyes glowed with vitality and his skin was browned by the sunlight. As I looked at that tall, straight column of bone and muscle, with its broad shoulders and handsome head, I could not help saying:

"If you were standing on a pedestal here in Rome there'd be a lot of gals in the gallery."

"Before you say things like that you should

THE MARRYERS

teach me how to answer them with wit and modesty," he said.

"Keep your eye on me and you'll learn all the arts of modesty," I assured him. "And especially you will learn how to disarm suspicion when you are accused of wit."

In a shaded walk of the Pincio Gardens he asked, "Is Gwendolyn looking well?"

"She's more beautiful than ever, and very well," I said. "She will be disappointed when she finds you here."

He stopped and faced me with a look of surprise, and asked:

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it, because she had planned to meet you with proper ceremony at the station and take you off to a real Roman luncheon. I am glad that you have come, for I have worked hard as your attorney and need a rest. I have had some fun with it, but I am delighted to turn the case over to you."

He did not need a chart to understand me, for he said:

"You must tell me what progress you have made with it."

THE MARRYERS

"Well, I suppose you have read of the Count Carola."

"Yes, and so has every one who knows Gwendolyn."

"He is the plaintiff who seeks to establish the claim that he is a better man than you are. My defense has been so able that he has challenged me, and I have named the weapons; they are to be pitchforks — American pitchforks."

Forbes laughed and remarked:

"You must take him for a bunch of hay."

"June grass!" I answered. "We'll need some one to rake after, as we used to say on the farm, and I may ask you to be my second."

"Does the count amount to much?"

"Not much; I have had him added up and his total properly audited."

"How are the judge and jury?"

"The judge is in our favor; the jury is in doubt. Gwendolyn insists that you don't want to marry any one at present."

"I want to, but I probably shall not," he answered. "When I marry I want to have done something besides having just lived. It

THE MARRYERS

seems as if it were due my wife. Besides, when I get married I want to stay married; I don't want any girl to marry *me* and give her heart to some other fellow. She must have time to be sure of one thing—that I am the right man. That cannot be proven with passionate vows or bouquets or guitar music, but only by sufficient acquaintance. On the other hand, I'd like to know, or think I know, that she is the right girl. If Gwendolyn really wants to marry a count it would be silly for me to try to convince her that I am the better fellow. She must see that for herself. If she doesn't, I should assume that she was right. God knows that I'm not so stuck on myself as to question her judgment. I'm very fond of her, but I have never let her suspect it."

"If I were you I'd begin to arouse her suspicions."

"That I propose to do, but delicately and without any guitar music. Love is a very sacred thing to me."

"And the man who talks much about his love generally hasn't any," I suggested.

"At least, if he has any love in him the

THE MARRYERS

cheapest way of showing it is by talk and song."

"It's so awful easy to make words lie," I agreed.

"If she wants me to enter a lying-match with these Romeos I'll agree, but only on condition that it's a lying-match—that we're only playing a game. I won't try to deceive her. Women are not fools or playthings any longer, are they?

"Generally not, if they're born in America," I agreed.

Here was the modern American lover, and I must acknowledge that I fell in love with him. He stood for honest loving—a new type of chivalry—and against the lying, romantic twaddle which had come down from the feudal world. That kind of thing had been a proper accessory of courts and concubines. It would not do for America.

"I see that I am putting the case in good hands. Go in and win it," I said.

"I'll make it my business while I'm here," said he.

"You're a born business man. I know it's

THE MARRYERS

fashionable to hate the word 'business,' but I like it. In love it looks for dividends of happiness."

"And I've observed that a home has got to pay or go out of business," said he. "If Gwendolyn would put up with me I believe we could stand together to the end of the game."

"I have some reason for saying that she is very fond of you," I declared.

"I wouldn't dare ask you to explain, but you tempt me," he said.

"A good attorney never tells all he knows unless he is writing a book," I answered.

We had come to the Spanish Stairs, where converging ways poured a thin, noisy fall of tourists and guide-books into the street below. I had seen the Stairs in my youth.

And I thought how many thousands
Of awe-encumbered men,
Each bearing his Hare and Baedeker,
Had passed the Stairs since then.

We made our way through crowded thoroughfares to the Pantheon and were in the thicket of vast columns when some one



How that blue monocle and the new attire and the smooth upper lip had changed the whole effect of Muggs!

THE MARRYERS

touched my arm. Who was this man with a blue monocle over his right eye, whose look was so familiar? Ah, to be sure, it was Muggs. Again his mustache had disappeared, as had my hat and coat and the old suit of clothes, and how that blue monocle and the new attire and the smooth upper lip had changed the whole effect of Muggs! Evidently the man was prosperous and entering a new career. How does it happen that he has come in my way again, I asked myself, and then I remembered that he knew that I was to be there. What was I to expect now?—violence or—

He smiled.

“Charming day, isn’t it?” he said, in his most agreeable tone.

He had neatly and deliberately removed his monocle as he spoke.

“Very! I suppose that stained-glass window of yours is a memorial to Wilton?”

He only smiled.

“As a European you’re a great success,” I went on.

“Beginning a new life from the ground up,” said he, and added, with a glance at the

THE MARRYERS

great bronze doors, "Isn't this a wonderful place?"

"Yes, it was intended for a mammoth safe where reputations could be stored and embellished and kept, but it didn't work."

"They cracked it and got away with the reputations," said he, with a smile.

"Exactly! In my opinion every man should have his own private pantheon, and see that his reputation is as strong as the safe. It's the discrepancy that's dangerous. People won't allow a reputation to stay where it does not belong."

He stepped closer and said, in a confidential tone, "I'm trying to improve mine, and I wish you would help me."

"How?"

"Come to a little dinner that I am giving and say a good word for me when you can."

"Are you trying to marry Mrs. Mullet?"

"Yes, I've fallen in love, and, as God's my witness, I'm living honest."

"Muggs, I'll help you to get a reputation, but I won't help you to get a wife," I said. "You must get the reputation first, and it will

THE MARRYERS

take you a long time. You'll have to try to pay back the money you've taken and keep it up long enough to prove your good faith."

Muggs's plan was quite apparent. He wanted an all-around treaty of peace. He was still levying blackmail; the thing he demanded was not cash, but a character.

"That's exactly what I hope to do," he explained. "I shall have all kinds of money, and I propose to square every account."

"That's all right, provided Mrs. Mullet knows the whole plan and is willing to undertake the responsibility."

He looked into my eyes, and said clearly in his smile: "You're the worst ass of a lawyer that I ever saw in my life. I've tried to be decent, and you've wiped your boots on me. Wait and see what happens now."

All that seemed to be in his smile, but not a word of it passed his lips. He neatly adjusted the blue monocle and lifted his hat and said "Good afternoon," and walked away.

I, too, had my smile, for I could not help thinking how this biter was being bitten, and

THE MARRYERS

how his old friends, the ghosts of the past, were now bearing down upon *him*.

We tramped to St. Peters, where squads of tourists seemed to be reading prayers out of red prayer-books and where a learned judge from Seattle, who had lost his pocket-book in a crowd near the statue of St. Peter, was delivering impassioned and highly prejudiced views of church and state to the members of his party.

We lunched at Latour's, where a long and limber-looking blond lady, who sat beside a Pomeranian poodle with a napkin tucked under his collar, consumed six cups of coffee and a foot and a half of cigarettes while we were eating. She was one of the most engaging ruins of the feudal world. What a theme for an artist was in the painted face and the sign of the dog! The head waiter told us that she was an American who had been studying art in Italy for years.

She ought to be mentioned in the guide-books, I thought, as we were leaving.

We tramped miles to an old barracks of a building called the Cancellaria, which, accord-

THE MARRYERS

ing to Baedeker, was clothed in "majestic simplicity."

"Baedeker is the Barnum of Europe," I said, as we went on, "but he is generally more conservative."

We arrived at the Grand Hotel a little before six. I went with Forbes to the Norris's apartments. Gwendolyn opened the door for us and greeted the young man with enthusiasm and led him to the parlor. Betsey was there, and we went at once to our own room.

"There's a new count in the game," she remarked, as soon as we had sat down together—"the Count Raspagnetti, whom we met to-day at Mrs. Dorsey's. He's the grandest thing in Rome—six feet tall, with a monocle and a black beard, and is very good-looking. He's no down-at-the-heel aristocrat, either; has quite a fortune and two palaces in good repair, and has passed the guitar-and-balcony stage. He's about thirty-two, and seems to be very nice and sensible. Mrs. Dorsey calls him the dearest man in the world, and she has invited us to dinner to meet him again. It was a dead set for Gwendolyn, and the child was deeply

THE MARRYERS

impressed. It isn't surprising; these Italian men are most fascinating."

"I suppose so," I said, wearily. "The countless counts of Italy are getting on my nerves. Counts are a kind of bug that gets into the brains of women and feeds there until their heads are as empty as a worm-eaten chestnut."

"Not at all," said Betsey; "but if she must have a title—"

"She mustn't," I said.

"You can't stop her."

"That remains to be seen," was my answer.

"Richard had better get a move on him," said Betsey. "He can't dally along as you did."

"Let him get his breath—he's only just landed."

According to my custom I dined with Norris in his suite. Forbes went with the ladies to the dining-room.

"Aren't you about ready to go back?" I asked, as I thought of Muggs's smile.

"I should like to," he said, "but the girls are having the time of their lives, and this air is

THE MARRYERS

making a new man of me. Then the young count seems to have let go; he doesn't annoy us any more. I'm hoping that Forbes will settle this count business."

While we were eating a telegram was put in my hands which read as follows:

I am stopping at the Bristol in Florence and must have your professional advice immediately. I cannot go to Rome, so will you kindly come here. I am in serious trouble. If I am not at hotel look for me third corridor of paintings, Uffizi Gallery. Please regard this as strictly confidential.

M. MULLET.

I answered that she should look for me the next day, and said to Norris:

"I have to go to Florence to-morrow."

"Take the car and your wife and the young people," said he. "The roads are fine, and you'll enjoy it."

I thanked him for the suggestion.

"There's one other thing," said he. "If you think Forbes means business tell him at the first opportunity that I am an ex-convict, and let me know how he takes it. We must be fair to him."

THE MARRYERS

"Leave it to me."

"We'll take them down to Naples with the motor-car soon," said Norris. "Vesuvius is active again, and we must see her in eruption."

He did not suspect that another Vesuvius was beginning to quake beneath us, and I did not have the heart to speak of it. I hoped that I could serve as a shock-absorber in the new eruption and save him any worry.

X

A DAY OF ADVENTURES WITH TUSCAN ARTISTS AND OTHERS

NEXT morning I found Betsey and the young people eager for the trip to Florence. Richard and I had breakfast together at eight-thirty.

"There's a new count in the game," said he, as soon as we were seated together. "He came to our table last evening. He's a grand chap and in favor with the king, to whom he is going to present Gwendolyn and her mother. He knows how to talk to women, and I don't. I shall not be in it with him."

"As to which is the best man it's her judgment, not yours, that's important," I said. "So long as I am managing the case you must take nothing for granted. Put her on the witness-stand, and let's know what she has to say about it. Before that I must tell ye

THE MARRYERS

something—in confidence. Norris is about the best fellow that I ever knew, but he got into trouble when he was a boy. He was the victim of circumstances and went to prison—served a year.”

“I heard of that long ago,” said Forbes.

“What!” I exclaimed, in astonishment.

“Nobody cares anything about that. Everybody knows that he’s a good man now—that is enough in America.”

“Do many know it?”

“Probably not. I have heard that even Gwendolyn and her mother do not know it.”

It surprised and in a way it pleased me to learn that I had told him what he already knew. I remembered that he had said, in his walk with me, that the distinguished editor who had got the tragic story from my lips was an uncle of his. So, after all, it was not strange that he should know.

“I presume that he had a wild youth, but he’s a good man,” Forbes added.

That was all we said about it.

Our drive, which began at midday, took us through the loveliest vineyards in Italy. I

THE MARRYERS

shall never forget the vivid-green valley of the Arno as it looked that day. Lace-like vines spreading over the cresset tops of the olives and between them and filling the air with color; stately poplar rows and dark spires of cypress; distant purple mountain walls and white palaces on misty heights—they were some of the items. Here in these vineyards, and in others like them, are about the best tillers in the world—a simple, honest, beauty-loving people who are the soul of Italy, and, in the main, no country has a better asset.

On the road we met the Litchmans, of Chicago, touring with their yelling-machine and a special car trailing behind them filled with clothes and millinery.

That night we dined together and went to the opera. It was all Greek to me, but it was great! They woke me at one, and we went home. Next morning, having learned that Mrs. Mullet was not at her hotel, we all proceeded to the vast Uffizi Gallery. Grand place!

What a wonderful procession these people in marble and paint see every day in the parade

THE MARRYERS

of weary pilgrims, in the moving mosaic of humanity. What a Babel of tongues, all speaking Baedeker! I wonder if the gods, emperors, and painted masterpieces fully appreciate this endless human caravan. It is far more wonderful than they. Who are these people? Ask any of them, and he will be apt to tell you that the rest are fools; that almost every one of them is looking for conversational thunder and—knockers!

Some hurry.

“Two more galleries to see, and the train goes at five,” you hear one of them saying.

I was nearly bowled over and trampled upon by three German women who had lost their party.

Once these marble floors were almost exclusively the highway of the highbrows. Now the sacred children of the imagination are being introduced to a new crowd. Newness is its chief characteristic. Here are the overgrown multitude of the newly rich, the truly rich, and the untruly rich. Here are the newly married, the unmarried, the over-married, and the slightly married, and the well-

THE MARRYERS

married from all lands, some of them new recruits in the great army of art.

We passed through the Hall of the Ancient Imperial Shoats into the long corridor filled with statuary.

"The old gods seem to have had desperate battles before they gave up," Betsey said to me. "Most of them lost either an arm or a leg in the war."

"Many were beheaded and chucked into the garbage-barrels," I answered. "The way Jupiter and Minerva were beaten up was a caution. It wasn't right; it wasn't decent. They were a harmless, inoffensive lot; they had never done anything to anybody. A lot of things were laid at their doors, but nothing was ever proved against 'em. These days we know enough to appreciate harmlessness."

"They were very beautiful," said Betsey, "but they're a crippled lot now."

"Yes, most of them have artificial limbs," I answered. "All they do now is to pose in vaudeville for the entertainment of humanity."

As we neared the room where I was to meet Mrs. Mullet we bade the young people go

THE MARRYERS

their way and look for us at the door about twelve-thirty.

We found the lady copying the portraits of our first parents. Her breast began to heave in a storm of emotion as she looked at us.

"Who are your friends?" I quickly asked, by way of diverting her thought.

"This is Adam and Eve," said she, almost tearfully.

"I'm glad to see that they don't make company of us," Betsey declared.

"They receive everybody in that same suit of clothes," I answered. "And Eve's entertainment is so simple—apples right off the tree!"

"I don't see but that they look just as aristocratic as they would if they had sprung from poor but respectable parents," said Betsey.

"Adam looks like a rather shiftless, good-natured young fellow, easily led, but, on the whole, I like them both," was my answer. "They're frank and open and aboveboard. If you're looking for your first ancestors and must have them, I don't think you could do

THE MARRYERS

better. Certainly Mr. Darwin has nothing to offer that compares with them."

Betsey and I had our little dialogues about many objects in our way, and now we had got Mrs. Mullet righted, so to speak, and on a firm working basis. She showed us through the gallery. I remember that she was particularly interested in the Botticelli paintings.

Mrs. Mullet said that she adored the Madonna—a case of compound adoration, for in its adoring group Botticelli succeeded in painting the most inhuman piety that the world has seen.

"Isn't that glorious?" Mrs. Mullet asked, as we stopped before his Venus—a tall lady standing on half a cockle-shell, neatly poised on breezy water.

"She has crooked feet," said Betsey.

"Well, I guess yours would be crooked if you had been to sea on a cockle-shell," I said, which will prove to the learned reader that we were about as ignorant of art as any in that hurrying crowd of misguided people.

"Oh, I think it's a wonderful thing! Look at the colors!" Mrs. Mullet exclaimed.

THE MARRYERS

"But the toes are so long—they are rippling toes. Those on the right foot look as if they had just finished a difficult run on the piano," Betsey insisted.

"She might be called the Long-toed Venus," I suggested. "But she isn't to blame for that. I suppose she was born with that infirmity."

So we crude and business-like Americans went on, as we flitted here and there, sipping the honey from each flower of art.

Twelve-thirty had arrived, and I suggested to Betsey that she should meet the young people and go with them wherever they pleased, and that they could find me at the hotel at four. She left us, and I asked Mrs. Mullet what I could do for her.

"I'm in perfectly awful trouble," she sighed, with rising tears.

"Tell me all about it," I said. "But please do not weep, or people will wonder what this cruel old man has been doing to you."

"That man insisted that I should have my bust made and my portrait painted and agreed to pay for them, but now of course I shall have

THE MARRYERS

to pay for them myself. He has threatened to sue me for a hundred thousand dollars for breach of promise. It will take more than half my property."

"Don't worry about the suit," I said. "I'll agree to save you any cost in that matter. As to the bust, you can use it for a milestone in your history. The painting will show you how you looked when you were—not as wise as you are now. You can look at it and take warning."

"I couldn't bear to look at them. I feel as if I never wanted to see myself again. I have written to everybody at home about this engagement. It's just perfectly dreadful!"

Again she was near breaking down.

"You ought to be glad—not sorrowful," I said. "That man can't even play a guitar. If he had a title or a fortune we wouldn't mind his being a scamp, but he hasn't. He hasn't even a coat of arms."

"There! I'm not going to cry, after all," she declared, as she wiped her eyes. "I'm glad you've kept me from breaking down."

"I wonder that you didn't wait until you

THE MARRYERS

knew him better before making this engagement," I said.

"But he was so gentlemanly and nice," she went on; "and Mr. Pike, the lumber king from Michigan, introduced him to me and said that he had known him a long time. Then the colonel is acquainted with counts and barons and other grand people. He claimed to be an old friend of yours and of Mr. Norris. He said that the last time he called on you he went away with your hat by mistake, and showed me your initials in the one he wore."

"He often associates with property of a questionable character, but I was not aware that he had got in with the counts and barons," I said.

"He knows the Count Carola very well," she declared.

"Leave them to each other—they deserve it," I said. "Return to Rome and refer Wilton to me, and refuse to have anything more to do with him."

She asked for my bill, but I assured her that dollars were too small for such a service, and that I couldn't think of accepting anything less than thanks in a case of that kind.

THE MARRYERS

I left her and got a bite to eat and went to our hotel at three-thirty. Betsey was waiting for me at the door. She was pale and excited.

"We've had a dreadful time," said she. "Gwendolyn and I had gone on while Richard was paying our bill in a shop. Suddenly a young man came and spoke to Gwendolyn. Richard saw it. In a second I heard a horrible thump and saw the young Italian lying in the mud. He didn't try to get up. Looked as if he was sleeping."

"It's bad weather for Romeoing," I answered. "That count should have waited till the streets were dry. Where are they?"

"Gwendolyn is in the parlor. Richard said that we should look for him on the road and took a fiacre and flew. The girl is frightened."

Betsey brought her out, and we got into the car and sped away.

"One more count!" I exclaimed, with a laugh.

"One less count!" said Gwendolyn. "I'm sure he's dead."

"Ladies have limited rights outside the house in Italy," I said.

THE MARRYERS

"I don't mind those silly men," said Gwendolyn. "I've been spoken to like that a dozen times, but I hurry along and pretend that I do not hear them."

"That count will be careful after this," I suggested.

"If he lives," said Gwendolyn. "I'm afraid that his head is cracked."

"His head was cracked long ago," was my answer.

"Uncle Soc," said Gwendolyn (she had begun to call me Uncle Soc there in Italy), "Richard and Italy could never get along together."

"Richard, Gwendolyn, and America are a better combination," I suggested.

"What a pretty thought!" she exclaimed, just as we overtook the young man about a mile out on the highway to Rome.

"Get in here and behave yourself," I said. "You've had exercise enough."

"I could stand more, if necessary," he answered, with a laugh, as he sat down with us.

That ride to Rome was one of the merriest

THE MARRYERS

in my life. For the young people it had been a day of joy and progress, but on the whole it hadn't been a highly creditable day. So let's drop the curtain right here and let it go into history.

XI

IN WHICH WE GET INTO THE FLASH AND GLITTER OF HIGH LIFE

NEXT evening Betsey and I went to dinner with Mrs. Moses Fraley, of Terre Haute, at a fashionable hotel. There we saw a show-window in one of the greatest matrimonial department stores in Europe. Buyers and sellers and bought and sold were there in full force to inspect the bargains, and we were able to note reliably the undertone of the market; and our observations had some effect, I believe, on the fortunes of Miss Norris.

Nothing was said of "the count" in our invitation, but we hoped to have at least a look at him. We put on our best clothes, and our plain, agricultural natures were well disguised when the impressive head porter at our destination helped us out of Norris's car and almost touched his forehead on the pavement at sight

THE MARRYERS

of us. That bow was easily worth a two-franc piece, and he got it.

"The Yank and his franc are easily parted," Betsey remarked, as we entered the great whirling door.

We were in the game, and I was firmly resolved to keep pace with our compatriots from Terre Haute for one evening, anyhow. Two more double-franc pieces in the coat-room established my reputation. With a good suit of clothes and the sudden expenditure of two dollars and a half you can acquire a reputation in any European hotel. Reputations are the cheapest things in Europe, but the costs for upkeep are considerable. Every young man in the place was trying to do something for us and I began to feel the rich, blue blood in my veins.

Mrs. Fraley and her niece, in long trains, received and presented us to their guests. Among them was the lady from Flint who had got the cramp in her leg at Hadrian's Villa, and who lived at the same boarding-house with Mrs. Fraley. Her name was Sampf—"Mrs. Sampf," they called her. I always have to go

THE MARRYERS

to my note-book when I try to think of that name. We always refer to her as the lady whose name sounded like boiling mush. There were also a sad but handsome young woman of the name of Rantone, a Minnesota girl who had married an Italian doctor; Mr. Pike, the whiskered lumber king who was studying the history of the world and whose bust we had surveyed in the studio of De Langueville, and a certain young man connected with one of the embassies.

"The count couldn't come," said Mrs. Fraley. "He wrote that nothing would please him more than to meet Mr. and Mrs. Socrates Potter, but that he was, unfortunately, quite ill."

I did not know until then that these good people had come to meet us.

"Perhaps you'll help us to appraise our loss by giving me his name," I suggested.

"Oh, it is the wonderful Count Carola!" said she. "He is about the most fascinating creature that I ever saw."

My brain reeled and fell at her feet and called silently for help. In half a second it had picked itself up again.

THE MARRYERS

We went into the dining-room. What a fair of jewels and laces and fresh-cut flowers! At eleven o'clock they were going to have a dance—kind of a surprise party! They called it The Ball of the Roses. Our table had a big crop of red and white roses, and in the middle of it was a little fountain among ferns. Its spray fell with a pleasant sound upon water-lilies in a big, mossy bowl.

The retired lumber king sat opposite me, and a retired frog sat between us on a lily-pad at the edge of the fountain-bowl. He was a good-sized real frog who was planning to return to active life, I judged, for he sat with alert eyes as if on the lookout for a business opportunity. I observed that he looked hopefully at me when I sat down at the right of Mrs. Fraley, with Mrs. Sampf at my side, as if willing to abandon the frivolous life any minute if I could suggest an opening for an energetic young frog. Mrs. Fraley explained that the frog was tied to the edge of the bowl by a silk thread which was fastened about his neck. I ceased then to fear and suspect him.

THE MARRYERS

I could not help thinking how much good Terre Haute money had gone into these decorations, and we should have been just as well pleased without the frog and the fountain.

Here we are at last right in the midst of things—grandeur! high life! nobility! abdominal hills and valleys! fair slopes of rolling, open country with their stones imbedded in gold and platinum! toes twinging with gout! faces with the utohel look on them!

What a pantheon of rococo deities was this dining-room—princes and princesses, counts and discounts, countesses and marquises, Wall Street millionaires and millionheiresses, and average American wives and widows with friends and dining-men. What is a dining-man? He's a professional diner-out. He has only to look aristocratic and speak Italian—or English with a Fifth-Avenue accent—and be able to recognize the people worth while. A fat old English duchess with a staff in her hand and the royal purple in her hair made her way to her table with the walk of an apple-woman. There was no nonsense about her, no illusions, no clinging to a vanished youth. She was a

THE MARRYERS

real woman, and I could have kissed the hem of her garments for joy.

A lady sat at one of the tables who suggested the chloride of nitrogen, being so fat and fetched in at the waist that her shoulders heaved at every breath, and one could not look at her without fearing that she would explode and fill the air with hooks and eyes and buttons.

A large, swell-front, fully furnished Pennsylvania widow sat near us with her young daughter and a marquis and a well-earned reputation for great wealth. It seemed to be a busy, popular, agreeable reputation, with many acquaintances in the room. The widow's costume pleaded for observation and secured it, for she sat serene and prodigious in jeweled fat and satin, dripping pearls and emeralds and diamonds. There was a battlement of diamonds on her brow and a cinch of them on her neck, surrounded by a stone wall of pearls as big as the marbles that I used to play with as a boy. Hanging from her ears were two mammoth pearls, either of which in a sling might have slain Goliath. Her shoulders glowed with

THE MARRYERS

gems, and a stomacher of diamonds adorned her intemperate zone. What a fresco of American abundance she made in the remarkable decorations of that room. By and by she drew a wallet from her breast and paid her bill.

"How wonderful!" our hostess exclaimed, suddenly.

A princess in red slippers and with no stockings on her feet, as Mrs. Fraley informed me, strode in with her young man and took a table near us. She had been a Wisconsin girl, and her happy Fifth Avenue dialect rose like the spray of a fountain and fell lightly on our ears.

"We had a sockless statesman in our country, but I never heard of a sockless princess before," Mrs. Sampf sputtered. "They tell me that some of these aristocrats are very poor."

Mrs. Sampf had been to Egypt and the Holy Land, and talked freely of her travels.

"Yes, we went up the Nile to see the dam," she said. "It's a good dam, I guess, but I didn't care much for it. What I wanted to see

THE MARRYERS

was the life. The folks are awful dirty; I wanted to take a scrubbing-brush and some Pearline and go at 'em."

"A few American women with scrubbing-brushes would improve the Egyptian race," I suggested. "How about the food?"

"Heavens! I've et everything there is going, I guess; it would take you a month to learn the names of the vittles. I've got 'em all in my diary."

"I suppose you enjoyed the ruins," I said.

And she went on:

"I saw a bull temple; it was very nice. You know, they used to worship bulls. I don't know what for. They must have been hard up for something to worship. There was five of us traveling on our own hooks. We saw one temple that was quite nicely carved—had crows and goats on it. I love goats. Sometimes I think that I must have been a goat in some previous life."

I disagreed with her.

"The pyramids were curious things," she continued. "Some folks never slid down into 'em at all after traveling all that distance, but

THE MARRYERS

I slid. Since I was a child I have always loved sliding. The most interesting thing I saw was three baby camels and some Highland soldiers in Jerusalem with no pants on and funny little skirts that came down to their knees," she continued. "In the Holy Land I saw a lot of men in skirts with baggy pants reaching from their knees down."

She was apparently much interested in the subject of pants, and hurried on:

"I found a wonderful old knocker there. By the way, I'm making a collection of knockers. Have you seen any good ones here in Rome?"

"Not a knocker! But I haven't been looking for them." And I added, "I wonder some one doesn't make a collection of pants—pants of every age and clime."

"What kind of pants did the ancient Romans wear?" she asked.

"The same as Adam—the style hadn't changed in ages."

This woman had got a knocker in Jerusalem, and seen some baby camels and a number of pantless men; she had seen a bull temple and

THE MARRYERS

slid into a pyramid in Egypt; she had "et vittles" everywhere, and suffered from cramp in sundry places, and languished in a hot, stuffy state-room with a quarrelsome lady from Connecticut, all for sixteen hundred dollars and four months of time. Yet far more than half of the great caravan of American tourists invading Europe and the East get no more than she did. The poetry and beauty of the Old World and the money of the New are thus wasted on each other.

"America is a pretty good country," I suggested. "There are buildings in New York as wonderful as any you will see here, and our scenery is excellent."

"But we have no ruins," said Mrs. Fraley.

"On the contrary, we have the grandest ruins in the world," I insisted. "We have the ruins of slavery and of the old error of unequal rights; there all our feudal inheritance has been turned into ruins. Even that everlasting lake of fire, which is still needed in Europe, is with us a cold and mossy ruin. Nothing in it but garbage these days. We have physical ruins, too, and very ancient ones, but we are a

THE MARRYERS

working community, not a show. In our structures, like the Pennsylvania Station, is the sublimity of hope and promise, not the sublimity of death and decay."

My friends looked at me with surprise. They had heard only the lyrical chorus of their countrymen accompanied by the jingle of francs.

"You're right," said the lumber king. "I thought that I'd try to live here a few years because I can't find enough playmates in America; every one is busy there. So I thought I'd come over here and study and fool around. It's done me good."

"Fooling around is better than nothing if done with energy and vigor," I suggested. "A capable fool-arounder isn't worth much, but he can keep his liver busy. Here they have professional fool-arounders with gold letters on their caps to set the pace. It's all right for a while, but you'll want to get back to the lumber business."

"Maybe you're right, but Europe has done me a lot o' good," said Mr. Pike. "The cure up at Kissingen fixed my stomach trouble. Cost like Sam Hill, but it knocked it out."

THE MARRYERS

"What was the cure?" I asked.

"Made me walk ten miles a day, and take baths and give up pastry, and go to bed at nine."

"And you had to travel four thousand miles and give up a lot of good American money to learn that?" I asked. "Old Doctor Common Sense, assisted by a little will-power, would have done that for you without charge right in your own home. Is it possible that the old doctor has gone out of business in Prairie du Chien?"

"He died long ago," said the lumber king. "We have to be led to water like a horse these days."

"We follow Cook in the trails of Baedeker instead of following the hired man, and we value everything according to its cost," I answered. "But it's good for the Yankee to travel in a pieless world."

"Travel is such a wonderful thing!" exclaimed Mrs. Fraley, who preferred to paddle in the heavenly gush-ways. "Don't you *love* Italy?"

I took off my mental shoes and stockings and began to paddle with her.

THE MARRYERS

"Grand country!" I splashed.

Then she lay down in the stream and got wet all over as follows:

"It's so wonderful! I love the churches and their music, and mosaics and statues, and the palaces and the nobility," Mrs. Fraley chanted. "These well-bred Italians look so aristocratic!"

"And they act so aristocratic—nothing to do but eat and drink and sleep and dance and get married!" was my answer. "We're rather careless about those things in America. A real aristocrat always gets married very carefully and so rescues himself from the curse of toil if need be. We don't take any pains with our marrying. We marry in the most off-hand, reckless fashion just to gratify our emotions."

"We forget that a dollar married is better than two dollars earned," said Betsey.

"And isn't soiled by perspiration," I said. "In this room are some of the shrewdest marryers in the world—men who by careful attention to the business have amassed fortunes. Here, too, are some of the most

THE MARRYERS

promising young marryers in Italy. They are sure to make their mark."

"Indeed! You must tell me of them," said the good soul.

"I shall tell you of one only—not now but before I leave you," I answered.

There was a high, moral purpose back of this remark, but it seemed to get me into trouble, for I had no sooner finished it than the frog gave a swift leap, broke his halter, and landed on me. I suppose that he was an Italian frog. Possibly he had only slipped his halter—I never learned the precise facts. Anyhow, he had got on the edge of the bowl unobserved, and picked out a partner. He could not have chosen a worse place to land, for he struck my shirt with a noisy thud just under my necktie, and bounded into a dish of French dressing and out of it. I saw him bracing, and was about to seize him when he fetched a leap that took him over the head of the lumber king. The frog landed with a wet thump on the bare back of the sockless princess—who sat close behind Mr. Pike—and tumbled into her train. He was not much of

THE MARRYERS

a bareback-rider, that's a sure thing. The princess gave a rebel yell and jumped to her feet and in honest Wisconsin English wanted to know what in God's name it was. The frog had got his toe-nails caught in some lace, and was captured by a waiter. Ladies who had not spoken the American language in years used it freely.

The princess left the room with her friends and a quantity of French dressing on her back. The diplomat looked at me and smiled and said:

"The princess is in hard luck, and I can't help speaking of it. If a meteor should fall into Italy it would land on the princess. Her husband gets drunk now and then and beats her up. I believe that he has worn out several canes on her person. I saw her once when she had been beaten black and blue. She decided then to leave him."

"But didn't?" I asked.

"No; her husband made love to her again, and she couldn't resist him. He's a great love-maker. Two or three times she has been on the point of going back to her people, but

THE MARRYERS

hasn't. Poor thing! She's too proud to go home and acknowledge the truth—that she has been a fool and her husband a brute.”

I was now pretty well prepared for my next talk with Mrs. Norris.

We left the dining-room, and I took Mrs. Fraley to a seat in the corridor and told her of the knight-like temperament of the young Count Carola, and of his high rank as a discoverer of wealth and beauty.

She showed no surprise, but said: “We had heard that he was engaged to Miss Norris, but the count says that the report is untrue. He has not really asked my niece to marry him yet, but he calls her the most beautiful woman he ever saw. Do you blame him?”

“Not a bit, although your niece is the second girl to whom he has awarded the first premium within three days. There may be others, but that is going some.”

All this had no effect on the armor-clad, brain-proof lady to whom it was addressed.

“It's his natural chivalry,” she said, as I rose to go.

“And discovering the most beautiful woman

THE MARRYERS

in the world is his daily habit," was my answer; and we bade each other good night.

When Betsey and I were going home she gave me an account of her talk with Mrs. Rantone. The young woman's father had been a successful Minnesota grocer. The family came to Italy on a Cook's tour. The young man fell in love with the grocer's daughter, and they met him everywhere they went. He followed them to Minnesota, and the two were married there. Mrs. Rantone had said that he was a fine man and an excellent doctor, but that his friends would have nothing to do with her because she was the daughter of a tradesman of moderate means. They had supposed that every American who traveled abroad was rich, as indeed such travelers ought to be. After living nearly eight years in Rome she had only three Italian friends. She naturally felt that she was a dead weight on the shoulders of her husband; that she could contribute nothing to his success and she was most unhappy.

"Are your parents still living in Minnesota?" Betsey asked.

THE MARRYERS

"They're all alone in the old home," said the poor expatriate.

"They must miss you terribly."

"Well, why did they bring me here?" was her pathetic answer.

I could see that Betsey was recovering from the fascinations of the marriage market.

"The '*devil-op-ments*' of this night should have some effect on the price of Romeos," I remarked.

"And the insanity of Juliets," said Betsey. "I'm going to spring this on Gwen and her mother. But they won't believe it."

When we arrived at our hotel its porter gave me a note from Norris which said:

"Please come to my room on receipt of this."

XII

IN WHICH NORRIS TAKES HIS LIGHT FROM UNDER THE BUSHEL

I FOUND Norris in bed, propped up with pillows and looking very pale. His mother and nurse were with him; the ladies had gone out to dinner with Forbes and would spend an hour or so at the ball.

"I had a bad turn at ten o'clock," said Norris, "but the doctor came and patched me up, and has gone out for a walk. Mother, will you and the nurse go into the other room until I call you? I want to talk with Mr. Potter."

Mrs. Norris, the elder, was a slim, tender little woman, with a flavor of the old-time Yankee folks in her customs and conversation. When she was not doing something for her "boy," as she called him, I often found her sitting in her rocking-chair by the window

THE MARRYERS

with her fancy-work or her Bible. Once when I sat waiting to see Norris, while he was napping, she sang "The Old, Old Story" in a low voice as she rocked.

Before leaving the room that night, when I had been summoned to his bedside, she went to his bed and leaned over him and looked thoughtfully into his face. Then she gently touched it with her hand.

"How is my boy feeling now?" she asked.

"Oh, I'm better, mother," he answered, cheerfully.

"You look more and more like your father," she said, standing by the bed, with her hands on her hips, reluctant to leave him.

"I wish I were as good a man as my father," said Norris.

"Your father! He is one of the saints of heaven," she answered.

Then she turned away and went through the door which the nurse had left open in her departure.

"I am glad that you heard her say that," said Norris. "It will help you to understand my father. I remember hearing a man say

THE MARRYERS

once that my father would go to Hades for a friend. Of course that overdrew it, but he was a most generous man, and what a woman my mother is! I often wake in the night and find her looking down at me, and she's up at daylight every morning. Wherever she is there's a home—something not made with hands, and it is very dear to me."

"The old, old sort—there's not many of them left," I said.

"Now, for the new sort," he whispered, as he drew a letter from his breast pocket and passed it to me.

It was from the young Count Carola, and I was not in the least surprised by this message in English which, with all its impurity, was better than the count knew:

It has become possible for me to render you a service, and I am glad to do the same, knowing that you are one of nature's noblemen. As you know, my income is not large, and I sometimes write articles for a newspaper here in Rome and for another in Naples, being fond of literature and politics. To-day a man asked me to read a story which they had and translate it into the Italian language. I found that it was an account of your career and told of things which,

THE MARRYERS

if they were published, would injure you and your family. I could not believe them, knowing, as I do, that you are the soul of honor. I told the man that it was false, and that he had better not publish it. After some arguments he gave up all idea of publishing the story, and gave it over to me. I was glad to do what I did, because I love you and the dear madame and your beautiful daughter, Miss Gwendolyn. It would not be consistent with the honesty of a gentleman of my standing to take anything from a friend for such a favor, and I ask you to offer me no reward but your friendship. So please do not think of it again. But may I not hope that you will let me try to win your heart. Mine is an ancient name and family, and every member of it has lived honest to this day. I would like to go to America and go to work in some business. I am tired of living idle and would be thankful for your advice. I am also very much worried, and I speak of it with regrets. I hear that Mrs. Norris is favorable to the Count Raspagnetti. You would not, I am sure, permission your daughter to marry him without securing information about his character, which you can accomplish it so easily here in Rome.

I made light of the whole matter to save him worry, but what I saw in it was a conspiracy between Muggs and the count; Muggs had dictated most of the letter. The thumb-print

THE MARRYERS

of Muggs was unmistakable. "Nature's nobleman," "the soul of honor," "a gentleman of my standing," "lived honest!" Who but the nugiferous Muggs, with his cheap, learned-by-rote polish, would express himself in that fashion? Any one who had known Muggs for an hour would see his hand in this letter. There were his stock phrases and that peculiar adverbial weakness of his. Who but Muggs could have written that sentence calculated to answer Norris's chief objection to such a man—idleness? He had delivered the whip into the hands of the count, but was holding the reins. The business part of the thing being over, Muggs had let him finish the letter in his own way.

"Who is the Count Raspagnetti?" Norris asked.

"I do not know him."

"A new candidate of whom I have not heard!"

"And another discoverer of wealth and beauty," I said. "Refer him to me. Above all, don't have any communication with the slim count."

THE MARRYERS

"Potter, you are a great friend," he said. "What the Count Carola wants is to marry my daughter, and I shall not submit to it."

His anger had risen as he spoke. He whispered his determination with a clenched fist.

"At last we have come to a parting of the ways," he went on. "I don't know how I shall do it, but I'm going to confess my sins. We'll get the family together, and I'll lay my heart bare. It's the only thing to do. It will be hard on Gwendolyn, but not so hard as marrying a reprobate. It will be hard on my wife, but there are things worse than disgrace."

"I welcome you back to happiness and sanity," I said, giving him my hand.

"Do you think I have been crazy?"

"Well, you haven't been right in your head on this subject, not quite sane about it. You have reminded me of a woman I knew who threw her cat out of a second-story window. The cat with open claws landed on top of a bald-headed gentleman. Then she tumbled down a flight of stairs and broke a clavicle and the nose of a man who was coming up. And what do you think it was all about?"

THE MARRYERS

He smiled as he looked up at me and shook his head.

"Nothing," I said. "She thought the house was afire when it wasn't. If you stand up to this thing like a man you'll be surprised by what happens and by the immensity of your former folly. Women are not playthings. They are built to carry trouble. A good woman can walk off, like a pack-horse, with a burden of trouble. You haven't been fair to your women. You have treated them as if they were too good to be human. It's a gross injustice."

"Call my mother," said Norris, "and then go down and meet Gwendolyn and Mary and bring them here. I'm going to make an end of this thing to-night."

"Please remember this—don't get excited, keep cool, and take it easy. I'll stand by you."

"Oh, I'm quite calm now that my mind is made up," said he. "If it kills me I couldn't die in a better cause."

I called his mother and went below stairs. As I waited I thought of the new plan of Muggs. The count's letter clearly intimated

THE MARRYERS

that Norris must be his friend or he would publish the facts. If he could force a marriage he would share the financial end in some manner with Muggs. A little after one o'clock the ladies arrived with Richard Forbes. I took charge of Gwendolyn and her mother, and the boy bade us good night.

We sat down together for a moment.

"We had a wonderful time," said Gwendolyn. "All the aristocracy of Rome was there."

"Including the wonderful Count Raspagnetti," her mother added. "The young Count Carola stood near as we got into our car. He is the most pathetic thing!"

"We must have nothing more to say to him," I said. "He has discovered another most beautiful woman in the world in Miss Muriel Fraley, of Terre Haute. He is one of the greatest beauty-finders that I have ever seen. But we must have nothing more to say to him. He has resorted to blackmail to achieve his purpose."

"What do you mean?" asked Mrs. Norris. Before I could answer she suddenly opened her heart to me.

THE MARRYERS

"So many things have happened and are happening which I cannot understand," said she. "My husband has never taken me into his confidence. I have long known that he was troubled about something. It has always seemed to annoy him if I rapped ever so softly on the door of his mystery. Now I do not dare to come near it for fear of making him worse. You seem to know the man Wilton. Who is he? Why does he turn up in Italy? I detest him, and I am sure that my husband does also."

"Mr. Norris has had business relations with him, but they are now at an end," I answered.

"So I had hoped," said she. "But he called here to see my husband yesterday. Of course he didn't succeed. The nurse gave Mr. Norris the card, and his symptoms changed suddenly and were alarming. I am terribly worried and nervous. I love my husband, and I've felt often that I haven't been a good wife to him, but he would not let me."

Her eyes had filled with tears.

"Your unhappiness will end this night. Come with me to Whitfield's room. He has

THE MARRYERS

something to tell you. He asked me to meet you here."

"How strange!" said Mrs. Norris, as she rose with a frightened look.

I led the way, and we proceeded in silence to the room where Norris lay. His mother sat beside him on the bed.

"Mary and Gwendolyn, come here," he said.

He took a hand of each in his as they stood by his bedside.

"Potter, I want you to stay with us and hear what I have to say," he called to me.

A little moment of silence followed in which his spirit seemed to be breaking its fetters.

"Mary, I have sinned against you," he said.

"It was your right to know long since what I have now to tell you. But I was a coward. I loved you and feared to lose your love, and so I kept you from knowing the truth about me. Then came Gwendolyn, and the lovelier she grew the more cowardly I became. I hadn't the heart to tell either of you what I now must tell, that I went to prison long ago for a crime. It was not a very bad crime, but bad enough to disgrace you."

THE MARRYERS

In a flash the thought came to me that he was not going to tell the whole truth; he would protect his father's good name.

Mrs. Norris put her arm about her husband's neck and kissed him tenderly. "My love," said she, "I knew all that years ago, but for fear of hurting you I've never spoken of it. Long, long ago I knew all about your trouble."

His mother rose from the bed where she had been calmly sitting with bowed head and tearful eyes.

"Not all," said she. "You do not know that he took my husband's sin upon him, and that all these years he has been suffering in silence for the sake of another. I am sure there is no greater saint in heaven than this man."

"Oh, Whitfield! Why didn't you let me help you?" said his wife, as she sank to her knees beside him.

The scene had suddenly become too sacred for any words of mine.

Not one of us spoke for a while, but there was something above all words in the silence. It was feebly expressed at length in these of

THE MARRYERS

Norris, and I like to recall them when I begin to feel a bit cynical:

"I'm no saint. I'm just an average American business man—very human, very foolish! But there are many who would do more than I have done for the love of a friend. My father was such a man."

Gwendolyn came and kissed me when I bade them good night, and I drew her aside and said to her:

"With such men in America why are we looking for counts in Italy?"

She made no answer, but I understood the little squeeze of gratitude which my hand felt.

XIII

IN WHICH I FIGHT A DUEL WITH ONE OF THE OLDEST WEAPONS IN THE WORLD

NEXT morning a note came to Betsey from Mrs. Norris saying that she and Gwendolyn had decided to spend the whole day at home with their patient, and would, therefore, be unable to ride out as they had planned to do. She inclosed another letter of dog-like servility from the slim count and asked me to see what I could do to suppress him. In this letter he referred to me as a vulgar fellow who had disregarded his challenge. This she did not understand, and rightly thought that I would know what he meant.

So I was reminded that the pitchforks and the time to use them had arrived. I informed De Langueville of the fact. He invited me to call at his studio at noon, and added that he

THE MARRYERS

hoped it would be convenient to bring the forks with me. I sent Betsey out shopping and 'phoned for Richard, and when he came to my room I met him with one of those weapons in my hands.

"I am ready for the stern arbitrament of the pitchfork," I said. "Will you come with me?"

"Certainly," said he.

"Come on," I said, as I started with one of the forks in my hands. "I'm going to get through with my haying to-day if possible."

"Hadn't we better send the forks by messenger?" said Richard.

"No, I'd rather carry them myself," I answered. "I don't want them to be delayed or lost in transit."

"They are not so elegant as swords or guns," he said, as he took one of the forks.

"They are more reputable," I assured him.

We made our way into the crowded street and soon entered a drug shop to buy some first-aid materials, and deposited our forks in a corner near a small boy who sat on a stool devouring prunes. He soon discovered a bet-

THE MARRYERS

ter use for his prunes and amused himself by impaling them on the fork tines. When we were ready to go we gathered the fruit and gave it back to the boy.

I never had so much fun with a pitchfork in all my life. In fact, I can think of no more promising field for the pitchfork than the city of Rome. It is an exciting tool, and as an inspirer of reminiscence the fork is even mightier than the sword or the pen. Mine rose above me like a lightning-rod, and currents of thought began to play around the burnished tines. I never dreamed that there were so many ex-farmers of our own land in Italy. A number of them stopped us to indulge in stories of the hay-field. We might have learned of many a busy and exciting day on "the old farm," but time pressed and we sprang into a cab and soon entered the studio of the sculptor with the forks in our hands.

"Here we are," I said, as De Langueville opened the door.

To my painful surprise, the young count was there. He was looking at a sword when we caught sight of him. He sheathed and laid it

THE MARRYERS

down on a table and joined the sculptor, who had begun to examine the forks. The end of each tine excited their interest. De Langueville felt them, and then there was a little dialogue in Italian between him and his friend which was not wholly lost upon me.

"They use it to fight Indians," said the sculptor.

"They are poisoned," said the count, as his eye detected some stains on the steel which had been made by the prune-juice.

"I think so," the other answered, and then, addressing me in English, he asked:

"Will you kindly name the day and hour?"

"Here and now," was my answer.

Another dialogue in Italian followed, and then De Langueville said to me:

"It is impossible. The count requests for more time."

"I have no more time to waste on this little matter," I said. "If he wishes to call it off—"

But he didn't—no such luck for me! I had talked too much. The count had taken exception to the words "call it off." They must have sounded highly insulting, for he flew mad,

THE MARRYERS

as they say in Connecticut, and stepped forward with a fine flourish and seized one of the forks. "Call it off" was apparently the one thing which the count could not stand, and I had meant to be careful. His rich Italian blood mounted to his face. I began to like him better.

"I will fight you here and at present if my friend the baron will give to us the permission," he declared.

"One moment," said the baron, as he hurried away.

We sat in silence for five minutes or so when he returned with a surgeon.

I could not run now, and there were no trees to climb, although there was an heroic figure of the New Italy with a kind of staging that rose to her chin. There was also a long alley that was lined with busts and statues.

"It looks as if we are in for it," Forbes whispered.

"I'm ready," I assured him. "A man who talks as much as I do ought to be willing to fight, especially when there's no chance to run. I enjoy life and safety as much as any one, but you can carry it too far."

THE MARRYERS

Forbes turned away and conferred with the sculptor, and placed us about fifteen feet apart.

"I will count three, and at the last number you will approach together and fight," said De Langueville.

The young count had no lack of courage, for I have since learned that he regarded me as a kind of human cobra with poisoned fangs more than a foot long. He was rather pale when we stood face to face.

I am a man a little past fifty, and not so quick as when I was a boy, no doubt, but I have always kept myself in good shape—tramped and chopped wood and hoed beans enough to feed Boston for a month of Saturdays; so I think that I am as strong as ever. I had no sanguinary designs upon the count; I chiefly harbored preservative designs upon myself. I had got into this trouble in a good cause, and my white feathers were carefully dyed. Of course I couldn't acknowledge that a count was better than a mister.

So I faced the blue-blooded warrior as if he were a cock in a field of good timothy, with

THE MARRYERS

rain-clouds in the sky. We stood with our forks raised, and the six tines rang upon one another as soon as the word was given. He was overwrought by his fear of poison, I suppose, and had not the power of arm and shoulder that I had. We shoved and twisted, and then he broke away and came on with little stabs at the air. Suddenly I caught his tines in mine and wrenched the fork from his hands. Forbes has said that I looked savage, and I believe him, for I was getting hot.

"First blood!" I shouted, as I rushed toward him, intending to pick up his fork and put it back in his hands. But he did not stop to learn my intentions. "First blood!" meant murder to him. I had taken but a step in his direction when he was in full flight. I didn't blame him a bit. I would have fled; any one would have fled. That yell and the prune-juice did it.

"Hold on!" I shouted, with a fork in each hand, as I chased him a hundred feet or more down a long aisle lined with the busts of grocers, butchers, brokers, and lumber kings. The words "Hold on!" must have sounded



“First blood!” I shouted, as I rushed toward him, intending to pick up his fork and put it back in his hands.



THE MARRYERS

nasty, for he put on more steam. I did not mean to hurt him; I only wished to take his hand and congratulate him on his speed. But I couldn't go fast enough. Before I was half down the aisle he had got to the end of it and jumped over the high shelf between the marble presentments of the missing actress and the Michigan lumber dealer. I knew better than to laugh—it was ill-bred—but I could not help it. Now I could hear the feet of the count hurrying toward me. I ought to have kept still.

"We cannot fight with such weapons," said the baron; "it is barbarous."

"If you will fight me with the sword I shall prove to you my grand courage," said the young count, as he emerged, panting, from behind a group of statues.

"I need no further proof of your courage," I said, gently. "You act brave enough to suit me."

"Try me with the sword," he urged. "You are one coward; you are one coward. You have attacka me when the weapon was not in my hand."

THE MARRYERS

Richard came forward coolly and put his hand on the count's arm.

"You are wrong, and you ought to apologize," he said, firmly.

The count turned upon him with a polite bow, and said:

"Perhaps you will give me the satisfaction."

"If you like, I'll take it up for him," said Forbes, with admirable coolness. "He is older than you, and not accustomed to the sword."

"Look here—I won't let you fight for me," I said. "These fellows are used to the sword and pistol. They have nothing else to do and are looking for a sure thing. Fight him with your fists—if he's bound to fight again."

"Him! That would be too sure a thing, I'm afraid," said Richard. "I've practised this game of fencing at college and the Fencers' Club. I'm not afraid of the count."

I had observed that a number of swords had been lying on a table near us. Before Richard's remark was finished the count had picked up one of them and said to my friend:

"Come—you are not fearful—like a lady. Give me one chance."

THE MARRYERS

Before anything more could be done or said the young men were at it, and, to my great relief, I saw that Forbes was able to take care of himself. The count was a clever swordsman, but my friend was stronger and just as quick.

It is about the prettiest survival of feudal times, this bloody game of the sword.

I observed that the clock in the studio indicated the moment of 12.18 when the contest began. It lasted for an hour or more, as I thought, when it ended with blood-flowing from the sword-arm of the count at 12.21. The count was satisfied and breathing heavily. Forbes was fresh and strong.

"It is enough," the slim count shouted, and the battle was over.

"You play with the sword so skilful," the latter panted, as De Langueville and the surgeon began to dress his wound.

"All you need is a pair of lungs," said Forbes. "The pair you have may do for sucking cigarettes, but not for fighting."

"And I politely request that you do not use them again in making love to Miss Norris," I said. "Hereafter I shall carry a fork with me,

THE MARRYERS

and any man who follows us again will get it run into him. But now that you know that they do not want to graft you on their family tree you will, of course, annoy them no more. I expect you're a much better fellow than you seem to be."

"And they will permission her to marry Raspagnetti?" he demanded.

"Why not?" was my query.

"Well, he has been married already and has amuse himself by dragging his wife around his palace by the hairs of her head."

"It's a bad fashion," I said; "it wears out the carpets."

He looked puzzled.

"But it's an ancient diversion of the Romans," I went on, remembering that panel in one of the galleries which portrayed the extraction of the whiskers of a captive who was tied hand and foot—one of the basest amusements I can think of.

As we talked the surgeon was at work on the arm of the young man.

"Let's go and get a bite to eat," Richard proposed, and we made our escape.

THE MARRYERS

While we were eating he said:

"Don't say anything of my part in this little scrap. I'm ashamed of it. To draw blood from him is like taking candy from a child."

At the hotel Richard found a cable that summoned him to New York. Late that afternoon Gwendolyn and her mother and Betsey went with him to the station where he took a train for the north. I bade the boy good-by and said as I did so:

"Leave the case in my hands again."

"It's hopeless!" said he.

"Not exactly!" I answered.

"She has turned me down."

"Turned you down?"

"Yes, I had a talk with her last evening."

"You'll have to try it again some other evening," I said.

"She doesn't want to marry any one. That's about the way she puts it—but more politely. I told her that if she didn't want to be proposed to again she'd better avoid me. I expect to convince her that she's wrong."

He left me, and I went to see Norris, who had sent word that he wished to talk with me.

XIV

MISS GWENDOLYN DEFINES HER POSITION

I FOUND Norris looking better, and it's a sure thing that I was looking worse. I felt weary—the natural reaction of all that deviltry! Exercise with the pitchfork is all right under proper circumstances, but a man near fifty years of age should use more care than I had done in the choice of circumstances.

"What's the matter?" was the query of Norris.

"Been fightin'," I said, remembering how I had answered a similar question of my father one day when I returned from school with a black eye and my trousers torn. "They kep' pickin' on me."

Then I told him the story of my quarrel with the slim count and its climax. But I

THE MARRYERS

said nothing of Forbes's part in the matter. We laughed so loudly that the nurse entered in a panic to see what was the matter.

"Nothing's the matter except good health," I said. "We're both twenty years younger than we were a short time ago, and if you know any remedy for that go and throw it out of the window."

She retired from the scene, and we went on with our talk.

"You're about the most versatile lawyer that I ever knew," said he. "Such devotion I did not deserve or expect. If there's any more fighting to be done we'll hire a boy. For what you have done I say 'Thanks,' and you know what I mean by that. Gosh t' Almighty! I'm going to get out of bed, and we'll have some fun."

"I'm beginning to long for the old sod!" I remarked.

"So'm I. Let's go south for a little while and then home. It looks as if we should have to take a count with us as a souvenir."

"The Raspagnetti?" I asked.

"The same," said he. "Read that."

THE MARRYERS

He drew from under his pillow a letter from the Count Raspagnetti, which said:

I am sorry that you are sick, for I desire so much to talk with you and tell you, I should say, how profoundly I am in love with your beautiful and accomplished daughter. The esteemed Monsignor who bears this note, and who is my friend and yours also, can tell you that I am worthy of your confidence, although unworthy, so to speak, of such an adorable creature as Miss Gwendolyn. But I feel in my heart that I cannot be happy without her. I assure you that I would rather die than find it impossible to make her my wife. So I hope that you will let me see you soon, if your health should cherish the endurance, and permit me to speak of such things to her.

I had scarcely finished reading it when Norris said:

"The Monsignor, whom I had met in New York, and who is one of the most courtly gentlemen you can imagine, came to see me this morning and recommended the count without reserve as one of the first gentlemen of Italy. I guess he's all right, and I agree with my wife that we will put it up to Gwendolyn and let her do as she likes. If she must have a title I presume she couldn't do better."

THE MARRYERS

I was about to suggest that she would need a special allowance for hair-restorer, but restrained myself. I thought that I wouldn't say anything disagreeable unless it should be necessary and also susceptible of proof.

"What does Gwendolyn think of him?" I asked.

"I haven't said a word to Gwendolyn about him—yet. I'll have a talk with her tomorrow or perhaps to-night. When I awoke this morning about two o'clock Gwendolyn and her mother were standing by the bed. The girl has taken the notion that she must do the nursing herself. I haven't been fair to them. I guess it's up to me to let them do the marrying. Mrs. Norris seems to like this man, and if Gwendolyn wants him I shall fall in line. I'm not going to be a Czar even in the interest of democracy."

"It's the wisest possible course," I agreed.

"I wish that you'd post yourself about the sailings," said he, as I left him.

I broke a Roman record that evening—went to bed at eight. In Rome the day doesn't really begin until about that hour. At two

THE MARRYERS

o'clock people are coming out of the cafés, and the blood of Italy is in full song. Betsey complained that I yelled in my sleep, and I believed her.

The voice of the nightingales awoke me just before daylight. What a mellow-voiced chorus it is! A man has got to search his memory if he's going to try to describe it. The softest tones of the flute are in that song. It has an easy-flowing conversational lilt. It's a kind of swift, tumbling brook of flute music. As the light grew a noisy band of sparrows came on the scene. For a little while the soft phrases of the nightingales were woven into the sparrows' chatter. They ceased suddenly. I rose and dressed and went down into the little park outside my windows just as the sun's light began to show in the sky. In a moment I saw a young lady approaching in one of the garden paths.

She waved to me and called, "Hello, Uncle Soc!"

It was Gwendolyn.

"Child! Why are you not in bed?" I asked.

"I've worked at idleness so long and so hard

THE MARRYERS

that I'm taking a little vacation," said she. "I sat all night with father. He couldn't sleep, and we talked and talked, and then I read to him and he fell asleep half an hour ago, and I came down for a breath of the morning air."

"Don't get reckless with your holiday—all night is a rather long pull," I suggested.

"I enjoyed every minute. You see, I've never had a chance to do anything for him. My father has always been so busy, and I away in school or traveling with my mother or Mrs. Mushtop. I was never quite so happy as I am now."

"There's nothing so restful as honest toil," I said. "The fact is you've been overworking in the past—struggling with luncheons, teas, dinners, dressmakers, and dances, and getting through at midnight. It's too much for any human being. If you could only go to work in a laundry or a kitchen or a sick-room, how restful and soothing it would be!"

"I understand you now, Uncle Soc," said she. "We must see that it pays. Last night I was so well paid for my work! I discovered

THE MARRYERS

my father. The night passed like magic and filled me with happiness. To-day life is worth living. He told me of his boyhood, and I told him of my girlhood and that I wanted to make it different.

“‘You must let me do the nursing,’ I said.

“‘Why?’ he asked.

“‘Because I love you,’ I told him, and what do you think he said?”

“My thinker got overheated and blew up the other day, and is undergoing repairs,” I answered. “So you’ll have to tell me.”

“I shall remember it so long as I live,” she went on, with tears in her eyes, “for he said, ‘I’ve found a daughter, and it’s the best thing that’s happened to me since I found a wife.’”

“My, what a night! You found the greatest luxury in the world, which is work,” I said. “Don’t go to dissipating like a child with a can of jelly and make yourself sick of it. Go easy. Be temperate.”

“Uncle Soc, you dear old thing!” she exclaimed. “I’m beginning to know you better, too. I want you to tell me something. Father said that we should be going home

THE MARRYERS

soon. Now, *what* can I take to Richard? It must be something very, very nice—something that he will be sure to like.”

“Why take anything to Richard?” I asked.

“I refuse to tell you why,” she answered.

“But please remember that I have not the slightest hope of every marrying Richard.”

“You have lost your heart in Italy,” I said.

“But I was kind o’ hoping that you’d recover it.”

“I know that you and father have been worried about that, but you didn’t know me so well as you thought. I had heard much about these Italians, and they are handsome men, and the Count Raspagnetti is a very grand gentleman. I have been impressed, for I am as human as other girls, but I cannot marry the count, and if he asks me I shall tell him so; and I can do it with a clear conscience, for *I* have given him no encouragement.”

I made no answer, being unhorsed by this unexpected turn.

“I do not propose to marry any one, and if you will think for a moment you will know why.”

THE MARRYERS

In a flash her meaning came to me. She'd have to tell her father's secret to the man she married, and that she would never do. Again that old skeleton in the family closet was grinning at us.

"Gwendolyn, my thinker has been worn out by overwork here in Italy or it would not have been asleep at its post," I said. "I take off my hat to you and keep it off as long as you're near me. Jiminy Christmas! I like the stuff you're made of, but look here—the case isn't hopeless. I'll show you a way out of this trouble some day. Come on, let's go in and have some breakfast. I'm hungry as a bear."

"No, thanks! I must go back to my patient," said the girl. "I never eat any breakfast."

"The breakfast habit is purely American. You'll acquire it by and by," I assured her. "Wait until you get a settled liking for long days and short nights."

She left me, and I thought that I would take a little walk under the trees before going in. I had not gone a dozen paces when Muggs

THE MARRYERS

came along. He was looking pale and thin and rather untidy.

"I knew that you were an early riser," said he. "I came to find you if I could."

He must have seen a look of anger in my face, for he went on:

"Don't be hard on me. I've come to bring you that two hundred dollars, with fifty added for the hat and coat."

He gave me a check, and it nearly knocked me down with astonishment. "What cunning ruse is this?" I asked myself, and said: "You're not looking well."

"I can't eat or sleep," he continued. "I've been walking the streets since midnight. There's something I wanted to say, but I'm not up to it now. I'll try to see you again within a day or two."

He bade me good morning and went on, and I was puzzled by the serious look in his face.

XV

SOMETHING HAPPENS TO THE MAN MUGGS

SOME people are so careless with their affections that they even forget where they laid 'em the day before, and often go about sputtering like an old gentleman who has lost his spectacles. My grandfather was once so mad at a table on which he had found them lying, unexpectedly, that he seized a poker and put a dent in it. He was like many modern lovers—divorced and otherwise. They should remember that misplaced affection has made more trouble than anything else.

Mrs. Mullet had been a bit careless with her affections, and especially in taking Mr. Pike's recommendation of Colonel Wilton. What could have been the motive of Mr. Pike?

Mrs. Mullet called to see us next morning.

THE MARRYERS

"Something very strange has happened," said she.

"If you were to tell me something that wasn't strange I wouldn't believe it," I answered. "Go ahead; you can't astonish me."

"Please read this letter," she requested, as she drew a sheet of paper from an envelope and put it into my hands and added, "It's from Colonel Wilton."

"From Wilton!" I exclaimed, and began reading aloud the singular human document. His emotion conferred rank upon her, for he had addressed Mrs. Mullet in this baronial fashion:

MY DEAR LADY MAUDE,—I have completed the payments due to date on the bust and the oil-painting, because I have decided that if I cannot have you I must have them. I want to live with them, for I believe they will help me. I tell you the God's truth, I have been a bad man, but I want to be better and make good to every one I have wronged. I can't do it for a little while yet, but I'm going to as sure as there's a God in heaven. I was a fool to write that letter, but I was discouraged. You are the only woman I ever loved. I take back all that I wrote in that letter. I won't put any price on you. I can't. You are better than

THE MARRYERS

all the money in the world. I don't blame you a bit for not having anything more to do with me. You don't know what I have suffered; you can't know, but *I* know. I shall never give you a moment's trouble. Don't be afraid to meet me in the street. I may look at you, but I shall not speak to you. Don't hate me; but, if you can, ask Jesus Christ to forgive me and help me to live honest. I don't believe that He wants me to suffer always like this. Don't hate me, because I love you, and please remember me as

LYSANDER WILTON.

Its script was curious. Every word was written with extreme care, and some were embellished with little flourishes. I remembered how slowly and carefully he had formed the letters in that signature in my office.

There were tears in the eyes of Mrs. Mullet when I folded the letter and looked into her face.

"What do you think of it?" she asked.

"Sounds as if he meant it, but he's an able sounder," I answered.

"He had a good case and has given up all claim upon her," said Betsey, in the tone of gentle protest.

"Oh, well! he wouldn't dare to bring a suit

• THE MARRYERS

here or in America," I objected. "She might get the hatchet, but he would get the ax."

"How would you explain his payments on the bust and the portrait?" Betsey asked.

Sure enough, why was he buying the bust and the painting, and how had he got the money to do it?

"It looks as if he had gone out of his mind," said Betsey.

"Nobody could blame him for going out of his mind," was my answer. "If I had his mind I'd go out of it."

"Perhaps she has driven him into a new and a better mind," said Betsey.

"That's possible. There's plenty of room outside his old mental horizon. If it's honest love I should think he would die of astonishment to find such goods on himself."

"Well, you see, he was not very well, and I was a kind of mother to him here," Mrs. Mullet answered, as she wiped her eyes. "He was kind and thoughtful and so very handsome. I was really fond of him."

Mrs. Mullet yielded again to her emotions. She was not a bad sort of a woman, after all.

THE MARRYERS

True, she was still afflicted with a light attack of the beauty disease. But she had a heart in her. She was, too, "a well-fashioned, enticing creature," as Samuel Pepys would have said. I didn't blame Muggs for leaping in love with her. It was as natural as for a boy to leap into a swimming-hole.

"What shall I do?" she asked, presently.

"Study art as hard as you can," I said. "Botticelli may help you to forget Muggs. But don't fail to tell me what happens. I've got to know how Muggs gets along with his new affliction."

She agreed to keep me posted, and left us.

A note came from Mrs. Fraley that afternoon. She wished to see me on a matter of business, and wouldn't we go and drink tea with them at five? They were spending the day in the Capitoline Museum, where Muriel was at work.

We couldn't drink tea with them, and so Betsey proposed that we walk to the museum and see what they wanted. We did it.

Miss Muriel was copying a figure of Socrates on the fragment of a frieze. The beauty

THE MARRYERS

disease had visibly progressed in her—hair a shade richer, eyes more strongly underscored. Old Socrates was so different, sitting in conversation and leaning forward on his staff. One bare foot rested comfortably on the other. They were a good-sized pair of industrious and reliable feet. He seemed to be addressing his argument to the young lady who sat before him. The expression of the big toe on his right foot indicated that it was not wholly unmoved by his words.

Mrs. Fraley beckoned me aside and whispered:

“The dear child is making wonderful progress. She is copying that for one of the New York magazines. Muriel has made a great social success in Rome. Mrs. Wartz has taken her up, and her name is in the *Paris Herald* almost every day.”

In a moment she made an illuminating proposal:

“I want to borrow fifty thousand dollars on good security—the bonds of the Great Bend & Lake Michigan Traction Company,” she said. “I would pay you a liberal fee if you would help me.”

THE MARRYERS

"It's a bad time to borrow money," I answered. "Is it a bust or a painting?"

"Neither; it's Miss Muriel's marriage portion. The count has proposed, and I find that he is one of the dearest, noblest young men that ever lived."

There was no help for these people. An appeal to their minds was like shooting into the sky or writing in water. You couldn't land on them.

"Oh, then it's a husband!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, and we want to take him home with us."

"He requires cash down?"

"I believe it is usual."

"Are you sure that Muriel could manage him? He's pretty coltish and has never been halter-broke. He might rare up an' pull away an' run off with the money."

"He loves her to distraction, he worships and adores her, and she is very, very fond of him."

"You are far from your friends here," I said. "Suppose you ask the count to call on me and talk it over. It may be that I could arrange

THE MARRYERS

easy terms. Possibly we could even get him on the instalment plan, with a small payment down."

"I would not dare suggest it," said Mrs. Fraley.

"Cable to your banker, and if the bonds are good he ought to be able to get the money for you."

"I thought of that, but to save time I hoped that you would be willing to let me have it."

"I wouldn't assist you to commit a folly which you are sure to regret," I answered. "In my opinion he would be dear at ten dollars. It looks to me like taking over a liability instead of an asset."

"We didn't ask for your opinion," said Miss Muriel, as she blushed with indignation.

"My opinions are as easy to get as counts in Italy," I said. "You don't have to ask for them. I give you one thing more—my best wishes. Good-by!"

With that we left them. Things began to move fast. Norris came down to dinner, and we all sat together in the dining-room with the

THE MARRYERS

new count. It was the last despairing effort of mama to grasp the persimmon. She had boosted her daughter within easy reach of said persimmon, but Gwendolyn refused to pull it down. Her attitude was polite but firm.

"It doesn't look good to me," she seemed to be saying.

The count told thrilling tales of royal friends and palaces, and they all rang like good metal, for this count was a real aristocrat. Still, "No, thanks" was in the voice and manner of Gwendolyn. He twanged airy compliments on his little guitar.

"No, thanks!"

Gwendolyn gave me a sly wink and suggested that I should tell a story. I saw what was expected of me and got the floor and kept it. Finally the count played his best trump. They would be invited to a fête in the palace of a certain noted prince.

"No, thanks!" said Gwendolyn, before her mother could answer. "It is very kind of you, but we shall be so busy getting ready to sail."

THE MARRYERS

The count took his medicine like a thoroughbred.

"And you—you must not be astonished to see me in America before much time, I should say," he answered.

"What a joy to welcome you there!" Mrs. Norris exclaimed.

Then followed a little duet in Fifth Avenue and Roman dialect with monocle and minuet accompaniment by the great artists Norris and Raspagnetti based on these allegations:

First: She was so glad to have had the great pleasure of meeting him.

Second: He was so glad to have had the honor of meeting her and her daughter.

Third: She was so sorry to say good-by.

Fourth: She was a dear lady, and could never know how much pain it "afflicted upon him" to say good-by; but fortunately she was not leaving him hopeless.

The climax had passed.

Gwendolyn got her hand kissed, and so did her mother—there was no dodging that—but it was our last experience with the hand-smackers of Italy.

We had a happy American evening together

THE MARRYERS

in the Norris apartments, and Mrs. Norris seemed to enjoy my imitation of her parting with the count. The first occurrence of note in the morning was Mrs. Mullet. She was getting to be a perennial, but she grew a foot that day in our estimation. She had brought with her a note from Muggs. He was very ill in his room and begged her to come and see him as a last favor. What should she do?

"Let's go and see him—you and I and Mrs. Potter," was my suggestion. "This has all the ear-marks of a case of true love. My professional advice has never been sought in a case of that kind; but come on, let's see what there is to it."

We went and found Muggs abed, with a high fever. No more nonsense now! I've got to be decently serious for a few minutes. We were amazed to see how the sight of Mrs. Mullet affected him, and how tenderly he clung to her hands, and begged her to forget the man he had been. She turned to me with wet eyes and said:

"I cannot leave him like this. I shall send

THE MARRYERS

for a nurse and doctor, and take care of him. He has no friends here."

"Bully for you!" I said. "If he's out of money I'll help you pay the bills."

We went away a little mystified by this behavior on the part of Muggs.

We were leaving next day for the south, and Mrs. Mullet came to say good-by to us.

"How is your patient?" I asked.

"He was delirious all night, and dictated letters to me as if I had been his stenographer. I took them down with a pencil. I have brought two of them for you to read. I do not understand them; perhaps you will know what they mean."

The first was addressed to a man in Mexico, and it said:

DEAR MACK,—At last my ship has come in, and I am doing what I have longed to do for many years, and what I have dreamed of doing a thousand times. I inclose a check for all that I owe you, with interest. Forgive me. Please forgive me. I didn't know what I was doing. I expected to return it within a week, but I lost it all. I want you to tell every one that knows me that I am an honest man.

THE MARRYERS

The second letter was to the Honorable Whitfield Norris, and it said:

DEAR SIR,—At last I am able to do what I have wanted to do for years. I inclose a check for all the money you have given me, with interest to date. Please send me a receipt for the same. I always intended to make good and live honest, and I want you to think well of me, for I think that you are the greatest man I ever met.

All this puzzled me at first, and I went at once with Mrs. Mullet to Muggs's room. The sick man's fever had abated, and his head was clear.

"You have been dictating a letter to Norris," I said.

"What letter?" he asked.

"Didn't you dictate a letter to Norris last night?"

"No," he answered, sadly.

"Have you any money?" I asked.

"I have made a little money out of an old investment in a copper-mine," he answered, in a faint voice. "It has begun to pay, and they have sent me eighteen hundred dollars. There's eleven hundred left. It's in the

THE MARRYERS

Banca d'Italia. In my book you'll find a check for that two hundred dollars. It's on the bureau there."

"You gave me that," I said.

"Did I?" he whispered, and was sound asleep in a few seconds.

I returned to Mrs. Mullet, full of sober thought.

"Those letters are the voice of his soul," I said. "It really wants to pay up and be honest."

She saw my meaning and wept, and said, as soon as she could speak:

"Perhaps, in the sight of God, he has already paid his debts."

"An honorable delirium isn't quite enough," I said, "but it does show that his soul is acquiring good habits."

"I'm so happy that you think so," she answered.

"Yes, I'd rather have him now with all his past than any count I have seen in Italy. There are all kinds of pasts, but Muggs is ashamed of his—that's something! Of course it isn't safe to jump at conclusions, but it looks

THE MARRYERS

as if the love of a decent woman had done a good deal for him."

I left her with a happy smile on her face, and way down in me I could hear my soul laughing at the wise old country lawyer who had got Muggs so securely placed in his rogue's gallery. He had been reading law in a better book than any on his shelves. I had once smiled when I had read in one of Mr. Chesterton's essays that "Christianity looks for the honest man inside the thief." I said to myself that I had never seen the honest man aforementioned. But here he was at last. I described him to Betsey.

"The love of that woman has done it," said she.

"The love of a good woman is a big thing," I answered, as I put my arm around her. "Kind o' like the finger o' Jesus touching the eyes o' the blind—that's the way it looks to me."

Next day we drove to Naples. Good-by, Rome, city of lovely shapes and jeweled walls and golden ceilings, graveyard of races and empires, paradise of saints and industrious

THE MARRYERS

marryers! How's that for a valedictory? Well, you see, I bought a guitar, and it's time I began to practise.

Naples is different. It's a kind of theater. There the very poor play the part of the starving mendicant as soon as they are able to walk; the cheap tradesman plays the self-sacrificing saint; the fairly well-to-do man plays the part of a millionaire with his trap and horses on the Via Roma, and every driver plays the tyrant. The song of the lash, which had its part in the ancient music of Persia, fills the air of the old city.

It worried us, and we went to Sicily and spent a month at Taormina—a place of which I do not dare to speak for fear of dropping into poetry, and when I drop into poetry I make a good deal of a splash, as you may have observed, and it takes me a week to get dry. Norris fell in love with it, and so did the ladies. I wondered how I was going to get them to move, but not for long.

Gwendolyn and I, sitting alone in the old Greek theater one lovely afternoon, had the talk for which I had been watching my chance.

THE MARRYERS

We sat looking out between the time-worn columns at Ætna and the sea.

"I'm tired of ancient history!" said she, closing her guide-book.

"Let's try modern history," I suggested. "If you will let me be your Baedeker for a minute I should like to point out to you a noble structure in America which is 'clothed in majestic simplicity.'"

"What is it?" she asked, eagerly.

"The character of Richard Forbes," I answered. "There's one fact in his history of supreme importance to you and me."

"Only one!" she exclaimed.

"At least one," I answered. "It is this: for years he has known every unpleasant fact in the story of your father's life."

"Uncle Soc," she interrupted, with a look of joy in her face, "is it—is it really true, or are you just saying it to please me?"

"It's really true," I said. "When I can't help it I tell the truth. I'm never reckless or immoderate in the use of it, for there's no sense in giving it out in chunks so big that they excite suspicion. I'm kind o' careful with the

THE MARRYERS

truth when I tell ye that Richard Forbes is better than all the statues and paintings and domes and golden ceilings in Italy."

"Uncle Soc, do you think that you could get rooms for us on the next steamer," she asked.

"Oh, what's your hurry?" I demanded.

She rose and said, with a proud, imperious gesture:

"Me for the United States!"

"I've already engaged the rooms, for I knew what would happen after we had had our talk," I said.

We were waiting to take our steamer in Naples. The day after we reached there Mrs. Fraley called to see us. She had read in a Roman newspaper that we were at Bertolini's, and she had come over to talk with me "about a dreadful occurrence." She had raised the spondoolix, and Miss Muriel had achieved the count. They had lived in paradise for three weeks and four days when the count got mad at Muriel and actually beat her over the shoulders with his riding-whip. It was all because the dear child had turkey-trotted with

THE MARRYERS

a young Englishman at a ball. She had meant no harm—poor thing!—all the girls were learning these new-fangled dances. Mrs. Fraley had naturally objected to the count's use of the whip, whereupon he had shown her the door and bade her leave his apartments. So she with the beautiful feet had been compelled to walk out of the place which her bounty had provided and go back to the dear old boarding-house. Muriel had followed her. They knew not what to do. Would I please advise her?

"You've done the right thing," I said. "Keep away from him. He'll be using his cane next. The whip is a good thing, but not if it comes too late in life."

"But how about my money?" she asked. "I can't afford to lose that."

"My dear madame, you have already lost it. You may as well charge that to the educational fund. To some people knowledge comes high. I had a good reason for advising you against this marriage. In our land every home is a little republic that 'plays its part in the larger republics of the town and the

THE MARRYERS

county, and the affairs of each home and the welfare of its inhabitants are the concern of all. Here every home is a little independent kingdom. Its master is its king. His will is mostly its law. When he gets mad his whip or his cane may fall upon the transgressor. It's the old feudal spirit—the ancient habit of thought and hand. Of course in most countries wife-beating is forbidden, but generally the woman knows better than to complain, for she finds that it doesn't pay. So she cringes and obeys and holds her tongue. In America that sort of thing doesn't go. If a man tries it, the republic of the town gets hold of him right away. Really, I'd about as soon have the rights of a goat as the rights of a woman in Europe. In spite of that she's often well treated."

I was interrupted by the porter's clerk, who came with a telegram. It was from Muriel, and it said:

Please tell my aunt to return immediately.
We have made up, and are very, very happy,
and we shall both be delighted to see her.

I read it aloud, and she rose and said:

THE MARRYERS

"I'm so glad. Please pardon me for troubling you again."

I pardoned her, and she went away, and so another American girl had begun to toughen her skin and adjust her spirit to the feudal plan.

The day we sailed a curious thing came to pass in a letter to Norris from Muggs in the handwriting of Mrs. Mullet. It said:

I hope you will be glad to learn that good luck has come to me. I thank God that I am able to return the last sum of money you gave me, with interest to date. My check for it is inclosed herewith. An old investment of mine, long supposed to be worthless, has turned out well. I have sold a part of my stock in it, and with the rest I hope to square accounts with you before long. My health is better, and within a week or so I expect to be married to the noblest woman in the world.

The man's dream had come to pass. His check was in the letter, and there was good money behind it.

"I congratulate you," I said to Norris when he showed me the letter. "You've really found an honest man inside a thief."

"Without your help it would have been

THE MARRYERS

impossible," said he. "It's worth ten years of any man's life to have done it. I suppose there's an honest man inside every thief if we could only get at him."

"And no man is as bad as he seems, and, therefore, if you ever feel like shooting me—don't," was my answer.

"What luck that she didn't get hold of a count!" Betsey exclaimed. "She was one of the most willing marryers that ever crossed the sea."

"But she didn't know how to advertise," I said. "Nobody knew that she had money. One personal in the *London Mail* or the *Paris Herald* would have crowded the Excelsior Hotel with impoverished noblemen."

"And yet I would have supposed that the worst of them would have been better than Muggs."

"Not I," was my answer. "Both Muggs and the counts have been mere adventurers—trying to get something for nothing. Muggs knew that he was doing wrong. His offense was so bad that he couldn't doubt its badness. But the consciences of the counts never get

THE MARRYERS

any exercise. They don't know that idleness is a crime, that a bought husband is baser than a poodle-dog. They are absolutely convinced of their own respectability. For that reason the average thief has a far better chance of being faced about."

We sailed. Mrs. Sampf, with a chestful of knockers, and the lumber king, with his bust and portrait, were among our shipmates. The latter had had a stroke of hard luck. Two gamblers at his hotel had won his confidence and taken a hank of his fleece at bridge whist. He had made up his mind that American playmates were more to his liking, that Grant was greater than Alexander, and that universal peace was a dream. This he confided to me one evening as we were lying off Gibraltar in the glare of the searchlights.

Brooms of light were sweeping the waters for fear some sneaking nation would steal in upon them like a thief in the night.

"These Europeans know better than to trust one another," said I. "Billions for ships an' forts an' armies, an' every dollar of it testifies to the fact that not one of these

THE MARRYERS

powers can trust another. 'Yes, you're a good talker,' they seem to say, 'but I know you of old. I'll eat with ye, and drink with ye, and buy with ye, and sell with ye, but dinged if I'll trust ye!'"

"They're a lot of scamps over here," was the conclusion of Mr. Pike.

"And especially unreliable in bridge whist," I said.

"But I've made money on the trip," said the lumber king. "I bought some shares in a copper-mine for fifteen thousand dollars, and they're worth at least ten times that. I happened to know the mine, and he needed the money."

"If I were you I'd have the details of that transaction engraved on my bust and set it up in my bedroom," I said, with a laugh.

"Why so?"

"It would give you a chance to get acquainted with yourself."

"Oh, I was honest with him!" said he. "I told him I'd give him thirty days to redeem the stock."

"Was it Wilton?"

THE MARRYERS

"Yes. Do you know him?"

"I know him, and if the stock is as good as you say it will be redeemed."

And it was, and I began to understand why Pike had been hand in glove with Wilton. He had been trying to get hold of his property.

We wept for joy at the sight of our native land—who doesn't?—and Norris, who looked as strong as ever, said that he longed to get back to his task.

Richard met us at the dock, and the young people fell into each other's arms.

"Gwendolyn!" Mrs. Norris exclaimed.

"Look here," said I. "This pair of marryers is not to be interfered with any more."

Muggs and his new wife sailed on the *Titanic*, and he met his death on the stricken ship like a gentleman; but the bride was saved, and came to see us in Pointview and told us the story of that night.

The ship was a part of the machinery of the great thought trust, which has the world in its grip. The power behind her engines was thinking in terms of dollars and cents—to be

THE MARRYERS

gained through the advertisement of a swift voyage—and down she went in a thousand fathoms of icy water.

I said to Norris when we were speaking of this tragedy as we sat by his fireside:

“The greatest of all commandments is this: ‘Thou shalt have no other Gods before me.’”

“Neither money nor titles, nor pride nor fear, nor power, nor church nor state,” he added.

“Amen!” was my answer.

Then there fell a long silence, and well down in the depths of it is the end of my story.

THE END



201

24

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